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ABSTRACT

Noting that over the last decade, the role of a foster parent has evolved from temporary caregiver to essential part of a professional team in determining the best long-term plan for children in their care, this guide focuses on practical ways in which best child welfare practice can be incorporated into the recruitment, training, and support of foster parents. The guide also examines ways that agencies can enhance the role of foster parents in a changing child welfare system. The chapters are: (1) "Introduction," including a history of foster care; (2) "The Roles of Foster Parents"; (3) "Foster Parent as Nurturer and Caregiver"; (4) "Foster Parent as Child Development Support"; (5) "Foster Parent as Disciplinarian"; (6) "Foster Parent as Supporter and Advocate in School Issues"; (7) "Foster Parent as Recruiter, Trainer, and Mentor to New Foster Parents"; (8) "Foster Parent as Mentor to Birth Parents"; (9) "Foster Parent as Facilitator of Relationship between Child and Birth Parents"; (10) "Foster Parent as Potential Adoptive Parent"; and (11) "Foster Parent as Team Member." (Contains 34 references and other resources.) (KB)

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TOOLBOXES FOR PERMANENCY

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by Susan Dougherty

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CWLA Press • Washington, DC

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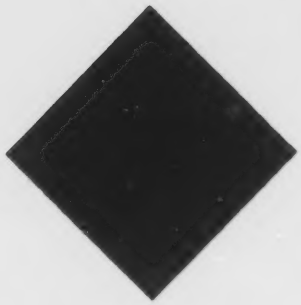

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Introduction

A Very Brief History

Family foster care began as an informal method of caring for children whose nuclear families were unable to care for them temporarily due to illness, economic difficulties, or other reasons. Extended family members, friends, neighbors, or church members might be enlisted to provide homes for children who could be expected to return to their parents after a period of time. More formalized systems of placement began to develop as industrialization resulted in increasing numbers of children without adequate homes, generally in urban settings. Children who had little or no chance of being reunited with their parents were placed by groups with a variety of agendas, some of which focused more on the value of the children as cheap labor than on the welfare of the children.

By the beginning of the 20th century, some states had stepped in to regulate these systems in one way or another. Board payments to families caring for children too young to be indentured and the licensing of foster homes originated before 1890. In the early 1900s, states started to supervise foster parents.

The federal government began its involvement in child welfare in 1909, with the first White House Conference on Children. This conference, convened to consider the circumstances of children in the United States, resulted in a clear declaration that (1) every child is entitled to a secure and loving home and (2) if possible, children should remain with their birth parents.

As the child welfare system evolved, more attention was paid to the protection of children from abuse and neglect. Changing attitudes about the status of children as people rather than as chattel, coupled with growing understanding about the nature and effects of abuse and neglect, led to state intervention in family life. At the federal level this culminated in the passage of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (Public Law [P.L.] 93–247) in 1974. Its focus on the identification and treatment of abuse and neglect, which led to a

quantum leap in our knowledge about these areas, also resulted in an enormous growth in the number of reports. Children began entering foster care in greater and greater numbers, spending longer periods of time in care, and experiencing larger numbers of placements.

To address these problems, Congress passed the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96–272). States were offered financial incentives to make reasonable efforts to prevent removal, reduce time in placement, and reunify families. Permanency planning, which includes family preservation, reunification, and timely adoption, became the new watchword of case planning.

States initially met with some success in enacting the provisions of this Act, but the mid-1980s saw the appearance of new challenges to the child welfare system. As more families were affected by substance abuse or HIV/AIDS, large numbers of infants and young children entered the system. Many brought with them physical, cognitive, or emotional problems related to combinations of nurture (poverty, neglect, or abuse) and nature (e.g., prenatal substance exposure or HIV positive status). At the same time, it became apparent that children of color were overrepresented in the child welfare population. The number of children in out-of-home care exploded.

In 1993 Congress responded again, this time with the Family Preservation and Family Support program. Funding for intensive family preservation and reunification services was provided. States were encouraged to focus on family-based and community-centered services to strengthen families. Still, agencies continued to struggle with large caseloads, high turnover of staff and foster parents, and increasing numbers of children with significant problems entering and staying in the system.

Congress reauthorized the Family Preservation and Family Support program in 1997, renaming it the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105–89) clarified and modified some of the policies established under the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, including

- establishing guidelines under which "reasonable efforts" need not be made to keep families together if child safety is at issue;
- establishing timelines and conditions for petitioning for termination of parental rights;
- revising timeframes for permanency hearings so that cases will be reviewed sooner; and
- encouraging concurrent planning, under which reasonable efforts toward reunification occur simultaneously with plans for adoption or other permanency options.

In the past 40 years the United States has seen the number of children in out-of-home care rise, fall, and rise again in response to variables, including

- understanding of and response to child abuse and neglect;
- a federal effort to prevent removal, reduce time in placement, and reunify families;
- the effects of drug abuse and HIV infection on the ability of families to care for their children; and
- attempts to achieve some balance between the goal of family preservation and the need to achieve permanency for children who cannot or should not remain at home.

Table 1. Number of Children in Out-of-Home Care Per Year

Year	Number of Children in Out-of-Home Care
1961	177,000 (Jeter 1963)
1977	500,000 (Shyne & Schroeder 1980)
1980	301,000 (U.S. DHHS 1986)
1982	190,000 (U.S. DHHS 1986)
1985	280,000 (CWLA 1998)
1990	400,000 (Petit & Curtis 1997)
1995	486,000 (CWLA 1998)
1999	547,000 (U.S. DHHS 2000)

While public policy has been changing in response to new knowledge, societal changes, and shifts in values and perceptions, child welfare professionals have been figuring out what children and families need. The focus of foster care has changed from simple placement in an alternative setting to protection, permanency planning (with an emphasis on family reunification), family preservation, and back to the achievement of permanency, this time with an emphasis on finding permanent homes, either within or outside the birth family.

Lessons Learned

As we move into a new century we must take stock of what we have learned and use our knowledge to improve the ability of family foster care to respond to the needs of children and families. Our best current understanding tells us that family foster care should be

- ***Family-focused:*** To be successful, foster care cannot be considered a service to the *child*, nor to his or her *parents*. Foster care services must be directed toward the *family unit*—parents and children considered as a system whose needs can be addressed as a whole.
- ***Child-centered:*** At the same time, the needs of the individual child must remain at the forefront of the case plan. This means there is a recognition that not all children are best off living with their families, and not all families should remain intact.
- ***Community-based:*** We have learned that when we remove a child from his or her parents for placement in a foster family outside the child's community the child is also removed from school, friends, neighbors, and other relatives; the child suffers multiple losses at a time when the removal itself is overwhelming. Community-based foster care allows the child to remain in contact with important persons in his or her life (including parents) and to stay in a familiar environment.
- ***Developmentally appropriate:*** Children have different needs at different stages of their development. At the most basic level, this means that a foster family who succeeds in caring for infants may not be the most appropriate placement for a school-aged child or for a teenager. Developmentally appropriate care also takes into account physical, cognitive, behavioral, and emotional differences among children of any age.
- ***Culturally competent:*** While the debate still continues over individual issues such as the placement of African-American children in white foster families, we have come to understand that cultural differences do need to be respected and accommodated.

The Role of Foster Care in Permanency Planning

P.L. 96–272 suffered some criticism, rightly or wrongly, that it over-emphasized reunification at the expense of child safety. In response to this, The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA—P.L. 105–89) clearly articulated that child safety was always the primary concern. In addition, it emphasized moving quickly toward permanence by setting new timelines for both determining and achieving the permanency plan. The legislation encouraged concurrent planning as a method for hastening permanency decisionmaking when reunification looks questionable. In other words, rather than moving through the permanency options in a sequential fashion, practitioners could be working simultaneously on both reunification and another option such as adoption in certain cases.

Perhaps the new requirements of ASFA were not as different from earlier requirements as was the philosophy that ASFA seemed to support. Just as the strong permanency planning philosophy behind P.L. 96–272 may have led some practitioners to overemphasize reunification at the expense of safety, it was possible that ASFA's emphasis on timelines and concurrent planning would lead to precipitous termination of parental rights (TPR) and adoption. Surely the effect of any new legislation goes beyond the letter of the law to how people perceive it and how they behave in response to their perceptions.

Both the meaning of ASFA and how to implement it in light of best practice have been broadly discussed among practitioners, policymakers, judges, advocates, and others involved in child welfare. Among those groups interested in how ASFA would be carried out were the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) and the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning (NRCFCPP) at the Hunter College School of Social Work, which joined to initiate a project aimed at assisting jurisdictions with implementation. They entitled their initiative "Renewing Our Commitment to Permanency for Children," communicating that permanency planning did need to be revisited and reinvigorated under the new federal requirements. The initiative sponsored a series of activities, including a launching conference (funded by Johnson Foundation) at Wingspread, which reviewed what had been learned about permanency planning over the past two decades; a series of regional practice forums (funded by The David and Lucille Packard Foundation, The Casey Family Program, and the Jessie Ball duPont Fund) for discussion of selected topics and formulation of action plans; onsite consultation and technical assistance; and creation of a series of "Tools for Permanency" publications, of which this, *Toolbox for Permanency: The Changing Role of Foster Parents,* is one.

This publication focuses on practical ways in which best professional child welfare practice can be incorporated into the recruitment, training, and support of foster parents and on ways agencies can address the role of foster parents in a changing child welfare system. We realize that some agencies are already implementing much of what is described here, but most will identify areas in which practice can be improved. Of course, we all work within the tensions between time and resources and best practice. Still, without a vision of best practice, we have little hope of moving forward, at whatever pace we can, to continually improve our practice and to improve children's chances for safety, permanency, and well-being.

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The Roles of Foster Parents

Traditionally, foster parents were considered to be temporary parents for children who could not, for various reasons, be living with their birth families. Agencies focused on the *temporary* nature of the role, moving children in and out of homes with little regard to the rights or feelings of the foster family, and often failing to consider foster parents as potential adoptive parents even when children in their care were freed for adoption.

Beginning with the passage of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96–272), the federal government has taken the lead in attempting to reduce the length of stays in foster care and speed permanency. Agencies have increasingly looked to foster parents to improve outcomes for children by involving them in planning, asking them to work directly with birth family members, and allowing them to adopt the children for whom they have been caring.

As foster parents enjoyed growth in their influence, they also experienced changes in the roles they were expected to take in the lives of the increasingly more troubled youngsters in their care. And they are now finding that understaffed agencies are unable to clearly define those roles and then prepare and support foster families who are trying to fill them.

While the number of children in need of out-of-home care is growing (486,000 in 1995), the number of families willing to take on the job of providing family foster care has been shrinking. In 1995 there were only 142,374 such families, a decrease from 147,000 10 years before, when there were only 276,000 children in care. There are many reasons for this decline, but one of the major ones has been shown to be role confusion and dissatisfaction with a lack of support from child welfare agencies (CWLA, 1998).

Following are some samples of the role of foster parents as described on current state agency Web sites:

> Foster parents provide a supportive and stable family for children who cannot live with their birth parents until family problems are resolved. In most cases, foster

> parents work with social services staff to reunite the child with birth parents. Foster parents often provide care to many different children (California Department of Social Services, 2000).
>
> Foster parents are special people who can share themselves and their lives with children in need. They are people who can face situations that challenge their parenting abilities and work in partnership with the Department (Tennessee Department of Children Services, 1999).
>
> Foster parents play a critical role in helping a child achieve a permanent living situation by participating as a team member on the child's case, working with the child's parent(s), or helping prepare the child to move into another permanent living arrangement (Nebraska Health and Human Services System Department of Services, 2000).

Each of these descriptions mentions different aspects of foster parenting. Reading each individually, the reader may get different impressions of the roles and functions of foster parents in each state. Yet most agencies are moving toward a more general approach to foster care in which foster parents serve in a number of capacities. In this section we will look at the major roles of today's foster parents and present some questions agencies can ask themselves as they seek to prepare individuals for those roles.

Roles

Foster Parent as Nurturer and Caregiver

> Foster parents should provide the children in their care with daily adult supervision, emotional support and affection, personal attention, and structured daily routines and living experiences; and should meet the children's clothing, hygiene, and personal needs (CWLA, 1995, p. 57).

This is the role that most people would identify as the primary, traditional one for foster parents. It is, in effect, the "job description" one would expect for substitute, temporary parents. It is the role that many families envision when they begin to think about fostering; and it is the role that most probably feel they can fill on the basis of their past experience, often as parents of biological children. There is a certain percentage of foster parents without prior parenting experience who nonetheless feel they can fill this role. And there are probably many potential foster parents who do not make an initial contact because they do not have that experience and do not know if they can fill the role.

Some of the questions for agencies seeking to find and keep families to provide this level of nurturing and caregiving include

- How can we reach out to individuals and families who might not otherwise consider fostering because of their lack of experience or confidence in their ability to parent?
- How can we provide training and support in the basic roles of nurturing and caregiving?
- How can we help foster parents place the nurturing role in the context of the other roles also required of foster parents in today's world?

Foster Parent as Child Development Support

The biological parents of children who are developing within normal guidelines generally manage to provide developmental support to their children with informal help from extended family and friends and periodic advice from their pediatricians. They may consult books or school personnel with specific questions, but they often are seeking confirmation of their own practices and techniques. It is only when they are faced with unusual situations—a developmental lag; peer problems; school problems; a death in the family; or trouble with drinking, drugs, or the law—that they seek out experts. Furthermore, whatever problems their children are experiencing have been observed over time, and they are either caught early or can be identified as belonging to a specific pattern of events.

But foster parents are often faced with developmental challenges that arrive at their doorsteps as full-blown problems with little or no known history to help with an understanding of how they occurred. They have to be ready to meet the development needs of the child by

- helping them cope with separation and loss,
- facilitating attachment,
- building self-esteem,
- affording positive guidance,
- promoting cultural identity,
- using discipline appropriate to the child's age and stage of development,
- supporting intellectual and education growth, and
- encouraging and modeling positive social relationships and responsibilities (CWLA, 1995, p. 88).

Furthermore, these are the most basic issues, ones that are factors in almost every foster child's response to abuse or neglect and removal from the birth family. Many foster children also face developmental challenges caused by prenatal substance exposure, lack of emotional or cognitive stimulation, poor nutrition, and other problems.

Some questions that agencies should explore to provide foster parents with the ability to support development of their children include

- How can we provide foster parents with information about child development in an easily accessible manner?
- How can we be sure foster parents are aware of the many challenges in development that face the children in their care?
- How can we target information about different areas of development (e.g., physical, cognitive, social, or emotional) to those foster parents who need it?
- How can we provide support to foster parents who are seeking help in this role?

Foster Parent as Disciplinarian

All children need guidance and discipline; it is part of the socialization process. The children who come into foster care have been exposed to forms of discipline that range from severe physical punishment to a total lack of consequences for any actions. Foster parents are expected to incorporate children with all backgrounds into their families, often with other children who have been reared with disciplinary techniques of various types. Most agencies have policies prohibiting the use of corporal punishment, particularly with children who have been the victims of abuse, yet many foster parents have raised children using spanking and other forms of physical punishment as standard disciplinary tools. So not only do foster parents have to deal with behaviors that may be especially disruptive and challenging, but they may also have to treat foster children differently than biological children because of agency regulations.

Questions that can help agencies address these challenges include

- How can we encourage foster parents to value the use of nonphysical means of discipline?
- How can the agency and foster parents together assess the most appropriate disciplinary techniques for each individual child?
- How can we train and support foster parents in a variety of disciplinary techniques?
- Can we match children who have specific disciplinary needs with families best suited to meet those needs?

Foster Parent as Supporter and Advocate in School Issues

For school-aged children, foster parents fill the role of meeting educational needs on a day-to-day basis, although ideally birth parents will also be involved in school planning, contact with educators, and support. Foster parents are the ones who provide space, tools, and help for homework. They are often the ones who meet with teachers and guidance counselors regarding testing, individualized educational plans (IEPs), special support, and discipline for school-related behaviors. Due to developmental delays, lack of support from birth families, and previous poor experiences with school, these activities may be more complicated than foster parents have experienced with birth children. In addition, foster parents may find that they have to be persistent advocates in order to obtain an appropriate level of support for foster children in their schools. To complicate this issue, some foster parents have limited experience working with the educational system, or they may even have a negative view of schools and educators from their own or their children's school days.

Furthermore, children entering foster care or moving from one placement to another are experiencing multiple disruptions in their lives. Family, home, pets, belongings, and neighbors are left behind when the child moves. Changing schools means changing teachers, classmates, and familiar buildings and routines.

Agencies may ask questions like these in addressing the ways in which foster parents can best fill the role of support and advocate in school-related issues:

- How can children remain in their neighborhood schools after removal or changes in placement?
- How can agencies and schools work together to address the needs of foster children, especially when the foster or birth families have limited experience in working within the educational system?
- When changes in schools are necessary, how can everyone involved contribute toward making the transition smoother?
- How can the agency present information about educational testing, assessment, IEPs, and other services and supports to foster parents in ways that are easily accessible and can be referenced when needed?
- How can the agency prepare foster parents to become advocates within the school system?
- How can foster parents serve as mentors to birth parents in this role?

Foster Parent as Recruiter, Trainer, and Mentor to New Foster Parents

Media coverage of the problems children bring with them into foster care has made the general public aware of the difficulties of fostering and has probably frightened many people away from considering it for their families. One way to counter these negative images of fostering is to employ positive messages directly from those who have achieved a level of satisfaction—successful foster parents. These are people who can present a positive yet realistic view of the rewards as well as the challenges of fostering. Many experienced foster parents would be happy to be included in recruiting, training, and acting as mentors to new families.

Following are some questions for agencies who would like to use experienced foster parents in their efforts to recruit and train new families:

- How can we identify those foster parents who best represent the message and the image we want to present to the public?
- How can foster parents act as recruiters of new potential foster parents?
- How can we develop and present training that makes the best use of foster parent expertise?
- In what ways can experienced foster parents serve as mentors to families who are new to fostering?

Foster Parent as Mentor to Birth Parents

Perhaps the biggest change in the role of foster parents has been the movement toward having foster parents provide direct services to birth families in the form of mentoring, modeling, and friendship. Permanency planning professionals have begun to see the value of having people who display good parenting skills share their expertise with parents who need to make changes in order to secure the return of their children. Who better to share effective parenting techniques than the people who are currently employing them with one's children? Yet asking them to offer direct help to the people who abused or neglected the children for whom foster parents are caring can be a delicate matter.

When an agency wants to expand the role of foster parents to include mentoring of birth parents, some of the questions it needs to address include

- How can we recruit new foster families who are willing to work with birth families?
- How can we persuade caseworkers to include mentoring as part of their service planning when appropriate?

- How can we prepare foster families for working with birth families on a wide range of issues including child care, child development, educational needs, health, and discipline?
- How can we help foster families work in a positive manner with birth parents who have abused or neglected their children?
- How can we match children and foster families in ways that best suit both the family's ability and willingness to work with birth parents and the child's specific needs?

Foster Parent as Facilitator of Relationship Between Child and Child's Parents

Not every foster family will have a personal relationship with each birth family. However, there must always be some level of positive support of the child's relationship with his or her parents. Foster families need to understand the importance of the parent–child bond, even when the parent has been abusive, neglected the child, or is no longer physically a part of the child's life.

One technique for maintaining family connections is the life book. Life books began in adoptions practice as a way to bridge the gap between birth and adoptive families. It has come to be used in foster care, too. The essence of the life book is the story of the child's life, told in words, pictures, and documents. It allows the child to be able to review the important people and events in his or her life, understand connections with the people who loved and cared for him or her, and place them in an overall context of chronology and emotional wholeness. Life books are underused because they take time to create and maintain, and caseworkers simply cannot do it all. But foster families are an excellent resource for life book preparation and can easily be taught to keep the life book up to date.

Following are some questions agencies can ask as they look to foster parents to provide a sense of continuity for children in their relationships with their birth families:

- How do we encourage all foster parents to value the importance of the parent–child bond, whether or not they have direct contact with birth parents?
- How do we educate both caseworkers and foster parents in the preparation and use of life books as a technique for placing the parent–child relationship in context for the child?

Foster Parent as Potential Adoptive Parent

Agencies have become more willing to consider foster parents for adoption. However, there can often be confusion on the part of the foster family about the likelihood of that occurring. In addition, the current movement toward concurrent planning allows the agency to pursue two possible goals at the same time—reunification if possible, or termination of parental rights and adoption if not. This may place foster parents in an even more difficult position as they form attachments with children they want to adopt, but are then expected to also support efforts toward reunification with the children's birth family.

If agencies pursue concurrent planning, they should address these questions as they define the role of foster parents:

- How do agencies clearly articulate the role of foster parents in concurrent permanency planning?
- How can agencies make better matches between foster families and children, keeping in mind the permanency goal as it will affect the foster parents?
- How can foster parents who hoped to adopt be supported when reunification is achieved?

Foster Parent as Team Member

The traditional view of foster parents places value on parenting, but on little else. It was not uncommon for agencies to drop children off at all hours and, with little notice, to remove them just as abruptly; and to provide foster parents with little or no input into planning for the child. Families were expected to accept children of all ages and needs, regardless of the family's ability to care for them.

The view of foster families by child welfare professionals has evolved, at least in theory, to that of accepting foster parents as members of the permanency planning team. Unfortunately many agencies pay lip service to the team concept, but they continue to treat foster parents as less valuable and less professional than staff members.

Foster parents are truly members of the permanency planning team when their contributions in the areas of assessment, service planning, and decisionmaking are valued by all members of the team. In addition, they should be provided with opportunities to grow and learn through preservice and inservice training and attendance at professional conferences. Agencies seeking to give foster parents the status of team member need to examine their commitment to doing so at all levels. Following are some of the questions they need to ask:

- How do we effect changes in agency culture that support the valuation of foster parents as professional members of the permanency planning team?
- How do we change our approach to the treatment of foster parents so that we are clearly articulating a belief that they are team members who make valuable contributions?
- What training and support do we offer to foster parents to back up that articulation with action?

The Toolbox

The remainder of this book will deal with the questions raised here, focusing on presenting tools you can use to facilitate change. For each foster parent role we will present

- responses to each of the questions listed above, with an emphasis on specific steps to take or techniques to employ in creating change in your agency, and
- a checklist for your agency to use. Each checklist has a different focus. Some are for use by individual caseworkers assessing specific cases; others can be employed by agency managers or administrators planning a change in policy and procedure.

In addition, some aspect of most roles will be illustrated with one or both of the following:

- an "Ideas to Think About" section that presents one agency's innovative project or approach, and
- a sample tool used by an agency to address some aspect of the role.

3 Foster Parent as Nurturer and Caregiver

The primary role of any foster family is to provide substitute parenting—nurturing and caregiving—for children who are unable to live with their biological families. Because there are more children in need of care than families to care for them, agencies are generally in a continual process of recruiting new foster families. Perhaps your agency runs newspaper or radio ads asking families to consider the idea of fostering a child in need of care.

But are these efforts reaching people in your community who might be able to provide nurturing and care for children who need them? Or are they missing a significant portion of the population who do not see themselves reflected in the wording of the ads? What kinds of people call your agency asking about fostering? Are they mainly married couples with experience in parenting? Are they people in their 30s and 40s?

Your outreach program may be failing to reach other kinds of families. Check out the Internet. Chat rooms and discussion groups have a steady stream of questions, for example: Can I become a foster parent if...

- ...I am a single person?
- ...I am 21 years old?
- ...I am a single male?
- ...I am not a U.S. citizen?
- ...my husband and I are a two-career married couple with no biological children?
- ...my wife and I are 65 years old?

There are two things that stand out about questions like this. First, they are not being addressed to you. These are people with an interest in fostering who, for whatever reason, are not ready to make a direct call to your agency. They are seeking information anonymously, making an initial attempt to decide whether fostering is right for them

without making a commitment. They are asking strangers for basic information about eligibility. And the people who answer them are often foster parents themselves. Second, these questions all deal with issues involving the ability of individuals and families to (1) meet agency rules about eligibility or (2) provide adequate parenting, despite perceived deficiencies in experience.

How can we reach out to individuals and families who might not otherwise consider fostering because of their lack of experience or confidence in their ability to parent?

If your agency wants this population to at least explore the idea of fostering, you should consider some of the following steps.

Redefine "Family" for Your Agency

Do you still target recruitment efforts toward traditional, two-parent families? You need to find ways to let people with different living arrangements know that you want them, too.

- Examine your agency's eligibility requirements. Do you permit single people, unmarried couples, same-sex couples, and people under age 25 or over age 60 to foster?
- If certain individuals or groups are excluded, reconsider your policy. Policies written in the past may no longer be effective in a changing world.

Target Individuals and Groups You Are Not Currently Reaching With Your Message

- Rephrase your ads: Use "foster parent" rather than "foster family."
- Publicize nontraditional families who are fostering, encouraging others to follow suit. Local newspapers may be eager to run a personal interest story that showcases community residents providing a loving home to children.

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- Place ads in locations they will be seen by populations you want to reach. Single adults may notice an ad posted in a health club or a coffee house/book store. Older couples may be looking for volunteer opportunities at a senior center or the local library.
- Every community has groups that cater to singles, single parents, same-sex couples, young adults, older adults—you name it! Find out what groups meet in your local churches, libraries, and other public meeting halls. Approach them with your message.
- Use a variety of media. Place newspaper ads in a different section of the paper—a boxed ad in the sports or education section might attract a reader's attention. Use radio spots on a variety of stations—classical music, all news, oldies, and top 40.

Vary Your Message

Each individual needs to hear the message that resonates in his or her own life. Some potential foster parents need reassurance that they can do the job, even if they do not have experience in parenting. Others need to know that holding a full-time job does not eliminate them from consideration.

Be Prepared to Answer Questions

Once you reach new people with your message, your agency must be ready to accurately answer their questions.

- Make sure that your first line of response is well informed about your outreach efforts. If the person who answers the phone does not know that you are actively seeking single individuals to foster, you may lose potential foster parents who are turned away inadvertently.
- Review any information you routinely distribute in response to initial inquiries. If necessary, rewrite pamphlets or orientation materials to make individuals and members of nontraditional families feel welcome and wanted.
- Think about preparing new materials that address questions different groups may have. For example, separate pamphlets might provide answers to frequently asked questions about single parenting and older parenting.

How can we provide training and support in the basic roles of nurturing and caregiving?

If your agency is willing to accept individuals and families who have little or no experience in parenting as foster parents, you must be prepared to offer training and support.

Conduct a Needs Analysis

- Find out what knowledge and skills people think they need to feel comfortable in parenting.
- Determine whether perceived deficiencies are real (knowledge or skills can be improved with training) or are related to fear of failing at a new role.

Survey Community Resources

What kind of parenting training is currently available in your community?

- Skills in infant parenting may be taught at hospitals or through a medical clinic or nursing organization. Community colleges or high schools may offer basic skills in classes aimed at new babysitters.
- Knowledge and skills needed to care for toddlers and preschoolers are often addressed in classes aimed at parents at risk of abuse or neglect.
- Classes with a specific focus on school-age children or teenagers may be taught by the local school district.

Address This Role in Orientation

Many agencies begin the processes of assessing and training new foster parents in a group orientation session. Use this as an opportunity to provide reassurance to individuals and families unsure of their ability to parent successfully.

- Present "success stories" of people who have successfully fostered despite a previous lack of experience.

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- Encourage potential foster parents to take advantage of community resources to learn more about parenting. Provide a list of available courses.

Offer Basic Classes

- Put together several short classes dealing with specific parenting skills: caring for an infant or a sick child, developmental milestones, childproofing your home, disciplining children, and other skills.
- Ask experienced foster parents to act as facilitators. They can both share parenting knowledge and act as foster parent recruiters.
- A group of parent educators developed The National Extension Parent Education Model (NEPEM) of Critical Parenting Practices, which identified six areas of competency for basic parent education. These are reproduced in Table 2. State extension service parenting programs were then reviewed with these priorities in mind. The six priority areas address competencies for foster parents, and they may also guide foster families who are willing to model or mentor birth families in critical parenting skills.

You can view the NEPEM report on the Internet at www.cyfernet.mes.umn.edu/parenting_practices/preface.html or obtain a written copy from

Charles A. Smith
R343 Justin Hall
Kansas University
Manhattan, KS 66506
E-mail: casmith@ksu.edu

Provide ongoing support. Individuals and families may be more willing to try foster parenting if they feel sure that there are resources available to answer questions or help with problems.

- Produce some short checklists or booklets that provide basic information on topics such as promoting self-esteem, helping with homework, or assigning household chores.
- Use a "buddy system" of experienced foster parents acting as mentors for those who are new to parenting.
- Provide a "hot line" number for questions related to parenting and nurturing skills, even if you can only operate it during office hours. Make sure the person answering the phone can comfortably handle basic parenting questions.

TABLE 2. The National Extension Parent Education Model

Category	Priority Practice
Care for Self	• Manage personal stress • Manage family resources • Offer support to other parents • Ask for and accept support from others when needed • Recognize one's own personal and parenting strengths • Have a sense of purpose in setting child-rearing goals • Cooperate with one's child-rearing partners
Understand	• Observe and understand one's children and their development • Recognize how children influence and respond to what happens around them
Guide	• Model appropriate desired behavior • Establish and maintain reasonable limits • Provide children with developmentally appropriate opportunities to learn responsibility • Convey fundamental values underlying basic human decency • Teach problem-solving skills • Monitor children's activities and facilitate their contact with peers and adults
Nurture	• Express affection and compassion • Foster children's self-respect and hope • Listen and attend to children's feelings and ideas • Teach kindness • Provide for the nutrition, shelter, clothing, health, and safety needs of one's children • Help children feel connected to family history and cultural heritage
Motivate	• Teach children abut themselves, others, and the world around them • Stimulate curiosity, imagination, and the search for knowledge • Create beneficial learning conditions • Help children process and manage information
Advocate	• Find, use, and create community resources when needed to benefit one's children and the community of children • Stimulate social change to create supportive environments for children and families • Build relationships with family, neighborhood, and community groups

SOURCE: C.A. Smith, D. Cudaback, H.W. Goddard, & J. Myers-Walls, *National Extension Parent Education Model* (Manhattan, KS: Kansas Cooperative Extension Service, 1994).

How can we help foster parents place the nurturing role in the context of the other roles also required of foster parents in today's world?

Agencies are becoming increasingly careful in their recruitment efforts to portray some of the more difficult aspects of foster parenting. Ads may specifically mention caring for children with physical, developmental, and emotional problems and working with birth parents as important components of the position. Pre-service and in-service training tends to focus on ways to handle difficult situations. Yet it is day-to-day care and attention that children need the most, no matter what their particular problems may be. Your agency can help foster parents remember the importance of their nurturing role in various ways.

Help Foster Parents Visualize Nurturing

- Use pictures to present the image of adults and families providing care and nurturance. Posters, pamphlets, and other written materials can include photographs that depict nurturing relationships. Examples might be a picture of an adult holding the hand of a small child as they cross a street or a family attending a baseball game together.

- Encourage foster families to take pictures of themselves and the children in their care and display them prominently in their homes. If you can, have caseworkers take pictures at home visits and give copies to both parents and children.

Celebrate Parenting as an Important and Rewarding Job

- Hold events such as picnics for foster families to attend together.

- Present awards such as "Foster Parent of the Month" that recognize the achievement of families who show their commitment to nurturing foster children. Look for acts such as coaching a foster child's soccer team or acting as class parent at school.

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Ideas to Think About: Public Service Announcements

Hennepin County Children and Family Services in Minneapolis, Minnesota, has discovered the value of using high-quality video public service announcements (PSAs) on local television stations as one effective recruitment tool for foster care and adoption. They use other recruitment methods, including newspaper advertisements, and have only recently begun buying paid radio advertisements. To date they have found that PSAs are an important part of their outreach to potential foster and adoptive families. (Hennepin County is quite large, with a population of one million individuals. This mass media approach, which works so well for them, may or may not be as successful as more personal recruitment methods in smaller counties or agencies.)

Hennepin County has been producing its own video ads for 20 years using professional actors, special effects, filming, and editing. New PSAs are created in response to agency needs. They have produced ads targeted toward audiences such as African-American and American Indian families, families willing to parent sibling groups, special needs children, teenagers, or simply families wanting to make a difference in the life of a child. Some, like one entitled "Problems," appeal directly to single people or those who may be younger or older than the "typical" foster family:

> When we last left Wally and the Beaver,
> Beaver had a big problem.
> He couldn't find his baseball.
>
> Today kids have bigger problems.
> Sometimes no one listens.
> Sometimes no one's there to listen.
> Sometimes it just gets to be too much.
> Lots of kids need foster homes.
> Kids from all kinds of backgrounds.
> Maybe you can be a foster parent.
> Married or single.
> Young or not so young.
> For some kids it could mean a whole new ball game.

Although these PSAs are expensive to produce, they cost nothing to air. Local television stations provide free air time, often during peak viewing hours. Some ads have been kept in rotation for as long as two years because broadcasters appreciate the high production values and find their message to be an important one to promote in the community. And for a reasonable fee Hennepin County makes their PSAs available for purchase to other counties and agencies who may not be able to fund productions of their own.

This effort, which has been in place since 1980, has been so successful that Hennepin County's foster families come close to reflecting the demographics of children in need of homes (although recruitment is always an ongoing process). Ninety-five percent of those who call in response to PSAs are females. At least half of current foster parents are single people. Pitches like "Teresa" effectively reach them:

> Teresa's life began to fall apart...when she was just nine years old.
> No one seemed to have any time for her.
> Except the wrong bunch of kids...doing the wrong kinds of things.
>
> The foster care program...
> Has made things lots better for Teresa.
> It's given her a loving family.
> Other kids in our community need foster families.
> Whether you're married or single,
> You can light up someone's life.

Kelly Sarenpa offers the following advice for agencies using televised PSAs:

- Limit the number of people who will be responsible for answering telephone responses to your PSAs.
- Train those people to respond quickly and accurately to questions and requests for information. Do not forget to train them to be welcoming and friendly, too!
- Keep statistics on the number and demographics of people who call in response to PSAs. Strong numbers provide support for budget requests to produce or buy new PSAs.

For more information about Hennepin County's PSAs, visit the program's website at www.co.hennepin.mn.us/fostercare/commercials/psa.html or contact

> Kelly Sarenpa, SW, Foster Care Recruiter
> Hennepin County Children and Family Services Department
> Foster Care Program
> Health Services Building—Level 9, MC 960
> 525 Portland Avenue South
> Minneapolis, MN 55415-2007
> Phone: 612/348-8060
> E-mail: kelly.sarenpa@co.hennepin.mn.us

CHECKLIST ON NURTURING AND CAREGIVING

Focus on Recruitment

YES	NO	
___	___	We use multiple methods of reaching out to potential foster parents: ___ newspapers ___ radio ___ television ___ group meetings ___ posters ___ foreign language ads ___ other:
___	___	We target recruitment at an audience that reflects the demographics of children in foster care. If "no," following are some steps can we take to do so: 1. 2. 3.
___	___	We extend outreach to singles, young people, older people, or others. If "no," following are some steps can we take to do so: 1. 2. 3.
___	___	We vary our message depending on the target audience.
___	___	We channel inquiries to staff members who have been trained to respond accurately and warmly.
___	___	We let potential foster parents know about opportunities available in the community for training and support in the nurturing role.
___	___	We provide training in parenting skills.
___	___	We provide support in nurturing issues to foster parents who feel they need it.

Foster Parent as Child Development Support

"Normal" child development presupposes a few things, including

- the mother has adequate prenatal care and nutrition and does not use alcohol or drugs while pregnant;
- the infant has his or her needs met consistently;
- the child is exposed to an appropriate level of physical, cognitive, and social stimulation;
- the growing child's physical needs (e.g., nutrition and safety) are met; and
- the child is not exposed to traumatic events, including death of or separation from caregivers or exposure to domestic violence.

The lives of the children in today's foster care system generally do not come close to meeting these guidelines. At the very least, foster children must deal with loss and grief issues related to separation from their parents. The backgrounds of most also include abuse and neglect. Many have developmental disabilities caused by prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol. Others receive inadequate or inappropriate stimulation in their homes, placing them at risk for delays in development of cognitive, physical, or social skills.

Taking all of these issues into account, it is little wonder that many foster children have difficulty in one or more areas of their growth and development. The challenges for foster parents are to

- recognize that chronological age or physical size is not a reliable indication of developmental status,

- identify the actual stage of the child's development across all domains, and
- provide appropriate support to enable the child to maximize his or her ability to proceed with the developmental process.

How can we provide foster parents with information about child development in an easily accessible manner?

Child development is often presented in a complicated manner. There are several well-accepted theories that seek to explain development across several domains. The language used to describe domains, stages, and developmental milestones varies from theory to theory. There is sometimes a temptation to present more than one theory, producing complicated comparison charts. Stages lasting several years are described with overall developmental goals. And yet foster parents, like all parents, are dealing with individual behaviors on a day-to-day basis. They need to be able to evaluate a child's actions without the benefit of knowing the child's behaviors over time. In addition, foster parents have a wide range of education levels, and they need to have materials available to them that are presented at an appropriate reading and comprehension level.

Following are some ways you can provide child development information to foster parents.

Select a Single Framework to Present

Instead of overwhelming foster parents with multiple theories (e.g., Freud, Erikson, Piaget, or social cognitive theory), prepare a simple presentation that provides observable developmental milestones for each age range in the physical, social or emotional, and cognitive domains.

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Focus Training on Concrete Examples

Find ways to help foster parents compare actual growth and behaviors to milestones within the framework you present.

- Use photographs or videos of real children.
- Have foster parents assess children they know, comparing observed behaviors with guidelines and milestones.
- Use easily recognized examples from movies, television, and real life.
- Give examples of observable behavior. For example: Instead of "learns to process concrete operations," describe an experiment in which equal amounts of water are poured into a tall, thin glass and a short, wide glass. (The child who understands that both glasses contain the same amount of water has moved from preoperational to concrete operational thought, stages of growth in cognitive development.)

Make Use of Existing Resources

Many organizations provide good child development information in reproducible format. Some you might consider are:

- Local schools, hospitals, or other community organizations may have materials they will be willing to share.
- Most states have extension services that offer free materials. Contact your local county extension office (offices are listed under local government in the telephone directory); a land-grant university; or the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250-0900, telephone: 202/720-3029, fax: 202/690-0289. A complete list of publications by state is available on the Internet at www.cyfernet.org/state.html.

Prepare and Distribute Your Own Easy-to-Follow Resources

- Prepare lists and charts that present basic milestones in ordinary language.
- Present developmental activities for foster parents to do with children at various ages and stages. Tie activities to specific milestones.
- Give foster parents materials that are easy to maintain. Individual handouts on paper are easy to misplace. Individual charts might be distributed on laminated pages or 5x8

cards printed on heavy stock. Prepare a series of tri-fold pamphlets on related topics, providing an envelope or other container for storage. Distribute loose-leaf notebooks or bound workbooks when presenting a larger quantity of information.

Keep Materials Available on a Continuing Basis

- Maintain an ample supply of information such as developmental milestones that can be mailed out quickly on request.
- Display materials in your offices and in other locations foster parents are likely to see them.
- Consider providing information on an Internet site.
- Offer in-service training sessions as either refresher courses or opportunities to learn more in depth. Consider focusing each session on either a separate developmental domain or an individual stage.

How can we be sure foster parents are aware of the many challenges in development that face the children in their care?

In addition to providing information about normal child development, it is essential that agencies educate foster parents about the factors that interfere with development for so many children in foster care. At a minimum, this means providing information about loss and grief and the effects of abuse and neglect on development.

Train Caseworkers in Child Development

This is a foundation upon which all attempts to help foster parents deal with developmental issues must be built.

- Caseworker training should include information on normal child development and the skills needed to recognize deviation from that norm.

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- Caseworkers should be able to make a general assessment of a child's physical, cognitive, and social or behavioral development; or have a resource available to make that assessment.
- Train caseworkers to understand the effects of loss, abuse, and neglect on development.

Include Developmental Issues in Foster Parent Training

All foster parents should be aware of the effects of loss, abuse, and neglect. In addition, they should be able to recognize behaviors that indicate a child's development may be affected by these issues.

- Focus on specific, behavioral effects that are likely to be observed in the home or at school.
- Provide reference lists to which foster parents can refer when they observe a behavior.
- Remind foster parents that there are few direct cause-and-effect relationships in child development. Any given behavior may be associated with several different issues or may be a result of the child's individual experience. Stress that reference lists are merely guidelines and suggestions, not diagnoses set it stone.

Focus on Those Developmental Issues That Are Most Common in Your Community

- If your community has a high percentage of children in foster care with a particular developmental problem such as fetal alcohol syndrome, make it a recurring theme in training and other educational initiatives.
- Consider the ages of children in foster care in your community. If there are large numbers of children in care in a particular age range, give extra attention to issues that affect that group.
- Remember that adolescents pose special challenges, as their cognitive and social development may lag behind the physical.

How can we target information about different areas of development (e.g., physical, cognitive, social or emotional) to those foster parents who need it?

Assess the Developmental Status of Children in Foster Care

There are many opportunities to gather developmental data about children in foster care.

- Caseworkers can include observations of behaviors pertaining to developmental issues in case notes. You may wish to develop a form or checklist to standardize the information gathered. But caseworkers should be required to complete descriptions rather than "one size fits all" checklists.
- Many children receive more detailed medical or psychiatric evaluations as part of their case plans.
- Life books maintained by foster parents should contain pages that record developmental milestones on an ongoing basis.

Provide Foster Parents With a Clear Picture of the Child's Developmental Status

- Share information about the child's physical, cognitive, and social development.
- Be sure to include strengths as well as weaknesses.
- Make sure foster parents understand that children, even those on a "normal" timetable, may show precociously fast development in one area and fall behind established guidelines in other areas. This means that they cannot expect the child's behavior or progress to be consistently representative of any one age range.

Offer Training and Informational Materials on Targeted Areas of Development

Based on each child's developmental assessment, give foster parents the opportunity to learn more about the child's specific challenges.

- Provide training or prepare educational materials on subjects frequently encountered such as fetal alcohol syndrome/fetal alcohol effects (FAS/FAE), self-esteem issues, cognitive deficiencies associated with lack of early stimulation, attachment, and trust issues.
- Be prepared to refer foster parents to other sources for information about specific developmental issues. Maintain a directory of local, state, and national agencies and organizations, as well as individuals in your own community who can provide information and guidance. Assign the maintenance of the directory to an individual to whom all staff members can offer additions and changes. Make sure caseworkers know where the directory is kept and how to use it.

How can we provide support to foster parents who are seeking help in this role?

Child development is not static. As children grow and age, and as they are exposed to new people and situations or revisit previous experiences through contact with their birth families, they make developmental strides and cycle through old stages. What works for the foster parent one day may not be effective the next.

It is not sufficient to provide training and informational materials to foster parents and expect them to facilitate the development of children in their care. They need other forms of ongoing support and assistance to deal with the uneven nature of development and particularly with regressions.

Develop Contacts with Community Resources That Provide Support on Developmental Issues

- Many communities have some type of child development or early intervention center, usually focused on infants and toddlers. Explore ways for foster parents to take advantage of their services, such as including attendance as a part of the child's service plan or securing a sponsored scholarship.
- Public school districts often have parent education centers that offer classes on developmental issues, provide resource materials, and answer questions.

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- Post-secondary educational institutions that offer degrees in child development may provide no- or low-cost programs, such as assessment or developmental play groups run by students.

Teach Foster Parents to Advocate for Developmental Assistance From Schools

Many children with developmental delays are eligible for and entitled to individualized educational plans (IEPs). Make sure foster parents are aware of eligibility requirements and know how to navigate the educational system to secure timely assessments and support from their schools.

Give Foster Parents Information About Local, State, and National Organizations That Deal With Specific Developmental Disabilities

Support and information about particular conditions is available from a variety of sources. Your community may have support groups to which you can refer foster parents. Some national organizations are:

- Developmental Delay Resources
  4401 East West Highway, Suite 207
  Bethesda, MD 20814
  Phone: 301/652-2263
  Fax: 301/652-9133
  E-mail: devdelay@mindspring.com
  website: www.devdelay.org

- The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
  3615 Wisconsin Ave., NW
  Washington, D.C. 20016-3007
  Phone: 202/966-7300
  Fax: 202/966-2891
  website: www.aacap.org

- The National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
  216 G Street NE
  Washington, D.C. 20002
  Phone: 202/785-4585
  Fax: 202/466-6456
  E-mail: information@nofas.org
  website: www.nofas.org

Ideas to Think About: The STAFF Program

Children who are prenatally exposed to drugs or alcohol pose special developmental challenges to parents, often beginning with difficult infancies. For those exposed to alcohol, developmental delays and learning problems are lifelong effects. Many of these children enter foster care or are adopted by families who have little knowledge about the developmental difficulties their children will face. In response to this problem, the Support and Training for Foster and Adoptive Families (STAFF) program was developed in South Carolina in 1997. The Center for Child and Family Studies in the College of Social Work, University of South Carolina, developed the project in cooperation with the state Department of Social Services.

The goals of this project are to "(1) decrease the numbers of foster care moves for infants with prenatal substance exposure, (b) increase the timely adoption of these infants with specifically prepared adoptive parents, and (c) sustain the adoption of these children over time through family preservation and support" (Burry, 1999). Although aimed at infant adoption, the program is open to foster parents and includes training and support components that address long-term needs of these children and their families. The STAFF program begins with a 6-hour training curriculum that includes

- information about addiction to facilitate understanding of birth mothers who continue to use drugs or alcohol while pregnant,
- the short- and long-term effects of drug and alcohol exposure,
- early intervention strategies for handling difficult infant behaviors and facilitating development, and
- information about obtaining individualized developmental services and accessing other resources.

The curriculum is flexible, allowing the facilitator to structure classes into 2-, 3-, or 6-hour sessions to meet the needs of participants. Invitation to the training is extended to all foster parents and prospective adoptive parents. The individuals and families who have chosen to attend are generally motivated by (1) an interest in determining whether they should consider parenting a child who is substance-affected, or (2) a concern that they already have a child who has been exposed to drugs or alcohol. Once training is completed, continuing support is provided in the following ways:

- Six follow-up newsletters are mailed to families at one-month intervals. These bulletins contain additional information about substance-exposed children, available support

services, and handling various aspects of the decision to foster or adopt. Book reviews and website references are also included.

- Foster parents who have participated in this project have reported that often the best support they receive is the sense of feeling empowered. Some enter the program believing that they have been ineffective in parenting children already in their care. Information supplied during the training helps them understand that they are not bad parents and that some of the problems they encounter are both common and unavoidable. Sharing experiences with one another during the training also gives them a source of peer support. Many continue relationships with one another after the training is finished, forming their own ongoing support systems.

- Project designers have remained responsive to feedback from participants. Parents were particularly interested in receiving support in providing educators with information about children with FAS/FAE. The Center for Child and Family Studies is now in the process of developing a resource booklet for educators that supplies both information and educational strategies for classroom teachers to help them maximize the learning potential of these children.

Plans were also made for additional supports with the assistance of state and community resources. A variety of factors have interfered with implementation of these plans, but the hope is that further review and modification will enable the project to provide these supports in the future:

- The state Foster Parent Association, working with local associations, has contracted to provide respite for families participating in the STAFF program. This will allow parents who need it to take breaks from child care, which can be very challenging with a substance-exposed infant or toddler.

- The Council on Adoptable Children (COAC), a statewide advocacy group, has contracted to provide a number of support services to STAFF families. These will include

  - partnering foster parents with "buddy families" who are available to answer questions and provide support,

  - providing a resource directory of agencies and services that may be helpful, and

  - establishing a "warm line" toll-free telephone number through which parents can access information about services and supports.

For further information about STAFF training and written materials (newsletters and booklet for educators), visit the project website at www.sc.edu/cosw/center/fostad.html, or contact

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The Center for Child and Family Studies
College of Social Work
University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC 29208
Phone: 803/777-0382
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E-mail: Beverlyi@gwm.sc.edu

CHECKLIST ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Focus on Training and Support

YES	NO	
___	___	Do caseworkers receive training in normal child development?
___	___	Do caseworkers receive training that enables them to identify areas in which a child's development is delayed?
___	___	Do caseworkers receive training in developmental issues that are prevalent in your community (e.g., prenatal substance exposure and effects of abuse or neglect on development)?
___	___	Do caseworkers know when to refer children for developmental assessments?
___	___	Do caseworkers include goals related to developmental issues in case plans?
___	___	Do foster parents receive training in or other information about normal child development?
___	___	Do foster parents receive training in or other information about developmental issues that are prevalent in your community?
___	___	Do you make foster parents aware of training and other resources concerned with child development that are available in the community?
___	___	At placement or shortly after, are foster parents given information about the child's developmental status?
___	___	Do foster parents who care for children with special developmental needs receive related training or other supports?
___	___	Do foster parents have a list of resources who can answer questions and provide assistance on development issues?
___	___	Do foster parents have information about school-based supports such as IEPs?

Foster Parent as Disciplinarian

The role of disciplinarian in foster care is challenging, to say the least. Several factors may be at work at once:

- Children enter foster homes with a broad range of behaviors that many families find unacceptable.
- Discipline administered in birth homes may have been inconsistent, ineffective, or nonexistent.
- Children who have had several placements have been the recipients of a variety of disciplinary techniques.
- Foster parents have their own history of discipline. As children, they experienced the discipline administered by their own parents. As adults, many have been parents and probably favor techniques they have used before.
- For children who have been physically abused, discipline may be synonymous with hitting (or worse).
- The foster parent usually has no clear picture of what forms of discipline the child has experienced previously.

Still, we expect foster parents to bring children with difficult behaviors into their homes. We ask them to treat foster children as their own, but warn that they cannot use the same disciplinary techniques. We set them up for problems with their birth children, who may be held to a different standard of behavior.

How can we encourage foster parents to value the use of nonphysical means of discipline?

State Your Agency's Policy Unequivocally

- Make people aware of your rules concerning corporal punishment starting with the first orientation session.
- Repeat it in preservice training.
- Set consequences for failure to follow the policy, and enforce them consistently.

Give Discipline Priority in Allocating Preservice Training Hours

Take the time during preservice training to set a solid groundwork for foster parent's understanding. Topics covered should include the following:

- Define both punishment and discipline, with clear examples of each. Many of us have been raised without understanding the difference. It is only fair to prospective foster parents to make sure they have the knowledge to distinguish between them.
- Discuss the goals of effective discipline.
- Explain the reasons behind the agency's policy on discipline.
- Describe the negative effects of physical punishment.
- Address common beliefs about physical punishment (and especially spanking), including those voiced by participants.
- Present alternative effective methods of discipline.
- Focus on discipline as behavior management, making the foster parent an agent of positive change for the child.

Present "Success Stories"

Foster parents need to know that different methods of discipline can be effective.

- Ask foster parents to share their experiences with disciplinary techniques that have proven to be effective for them. Invite them to sit on panels or videotape their stories to show during training or other meetings.
- Recognize effective discipline in written materials and posters displayed in the training room.
- Celebrate special successes with special status. Name the "Discipline Success of the Month."

How can the agency and foster parents together assess the most appropriate disciplinary techniques for each child?

Each child responds in her own way to various methods of discipline. Age, developmental status, prior experience, and even temperament are factors that affect the way a child may react to any given approach. So how does the foster parent know what techniques to try in the management of behavior?

Treat the Foster Parent as a Partner in Planning for Discipline

- Consider the child's developmental assessment. Talk about how both the child's chronological age and developmental age affect the choice of discipline.
- Consider the foster parent's comfort level with various techniques as well. With what methods do they have experience? What are they willing to try? What do they feel they cannot do?
- Work out a plan. List the steps the foster family will follow when misbehavior occurs. Make sure foster parents understand and are willing to carry out the plan.

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Share Whatever Information is Available

- One source of information about what works or does not work may be the experiences of foster parents from a child's previous placement(s).
- Birth parents, too, may be a valuable resource. Even if discipline was not consistently enforced, the child may respond to some form of behavior management that worked at home. Or you may be able to pass on information about techniques that were particularly ineffective.

How can we train and support foster parents in a variety of disciplinary techniques?

Foster parents need their own toolbox containing a variety of behavior management methods. Agencies can help ensure that the toolbox is full, tools are well-maintained, and new tools are added from time to time.

Help Foster Parents Understand the Need to Set Priorities in Managing Behavior

Children entering foster care may bring an assortment of behaviors the foster family would like to change. Help parents determine which behaviors are in need of management and select a few to work on through discipline. With fewer behaviors on which to focus, parents may find it easier to decide how to approach each one individually.

Make Behavior Management a Recurring Theme

- Many in-service training programs focus on problems associated with a particular age or type of behavior. Use these opportunities to review agency policy, repeat information about effective methods, and supply specific examples.
- Ask for opportunities to speak at support group meetings, giving foster parents a chance to ask questions about specific behaviors and discipline methods.
- Talk about disciplinary successes and failures at every regular visit.

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Can we match children who have specific disciplinary needs with families best suited to meet those needs?

Many people are more comfortable, and therefore probably more effective, in parenting children of a particular age or developmental level. Some who are wonderful with infants and toddlers find the challenges of adolescence more than they wish to handle. Others can deal with the most difficult teenage problems, but they have no patience with younger children. Agencies often try to match families and children along age or developmental lines. In the same way, we can consider disciplinary needs in placement.

Discuss Discipline During the Mutual Assessment Process

- Explore the prospective foster parent's experience with discipline, both as a child and as a parent.
- Find out what techniques the foster parent knows how to use. Are there any he knows but will not try? Why?
- Assess the foster parent's willingness to learn and try new techniques.
- Assess the ability of children in the home to understand and accept different behaviors and needs of foster children. In addition to age and developmental status, consider the child's own history with discipline and her flexibility in adjusting to new situations.

Assess the Child's Disciplinary Needs

When placing a child, in addition to considering age and developmental status, look at issues such as the following:

- What behaviors are foster parents most likely to see?
- How has the child been disciplined for these behaviors in the past?
- Has the child responded well or badly to any type of discipline in other placements?

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Discuss Behaviors and Discipline With Foster Parents Before Placement

- Let foster parents know what kind of behaviors they are likely to see if they take the child into their home.
- Talk about specific disciplinary techniques that might be employed for the individual child.
- Assess the foster family's willingness and ability to manage the child's behavior.

Avoid Placing Parents in the Position of Treating a Foster Child Differently Than Other Children of the Same Age in the Home

- Consider the behaviors the child may exhibit. Does an 8-year-old boy refuse to eat anything green? It would not be a good idea to place him in a home in which another school-aged child is expected to eat a balanced diet. Does a teenager dye her hair? Do not place her in a family in which hair coloring is not permitted.
- Do not place two children with very different behavior management needs in the same home.

Ideas to Think About: PRIDE

Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education (PRIDE) is a program that provides a framework for recruitment, assessment, and preservice and inservice training for foster and adoptive parents. The project was developed at the initiation of the Illinois Department of Family and Children's Services and the Child Welfare League of America, with the input and collaboration of 14 state child welfare agencies, one private foster care agency operating in several states, two national resource centers, one foundation, and several universities.

For prospective foster families, PRIDE addresses many issues, including the topic of discipline. During the preservice period the curriculum includes three hours of group classwork on discipline. In addition, the family's values, experiences, and expectations about discipline are discussed in detail in the process of mutual assessment. Knowledge and skills related to effective discipline are addressed in preservice competencies and can be identified as specific learning needs for the family. The program provides caseworkers with tools to track the family's learning needs and assess progress in meeting them.

In addition, a separate 6-hour module is available for continuing development through inservice training. *Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture, and Meet Developmental Needs* addresses additional competencies related to the use of disciplinary techniques to promote positive behavior, encourage self-responsibility, and respond to unacceptable behavior.

For more information about PRIDE, contact

Maureen Leighton
Child Welfare League of America
300 Congress Street, Suite 305
Quincy, MA 02169
Phone: 617/769-4006
Fax: 617/770-4258
website: www.cwla.org

CHECKLIST ON DISCIPLINE

Focus on Placement Considerations

YES	NO	
—	—	Has the child's disciplinary history been noted? What methods have been used?
—	—	Has discipline been administered with consistency?
—	—	Has the child been punished by being physically abused?
—	—	Has the child been punished by being subjected to verbal abuse, ridicule, or humiliation? What three behaviors are most likely to require management in placement? 1. 2. 3.
—	—	Have the foster parents agreed not to use physical punishment? What behavior management methods are the foster parents most comfortable using? 1. 2. 3.
—	—	Have the foster parents received training in other methods of behavior management?
—	—	Are there other children in the home? If so, what three behaviors are most often the subject of discipline? 1. 2. 3.
—	—	Do the foster parents believe they can manage this child's behavior? If "no," what additional training or supports might enable them to do so?

6

Foster Parent as Supporter and Advocate in School Issues

One issue that all foster parents of children over the age of six will have to tackle is that of education. School-aged children in foster care have to continue receiving educational services. Many of the children who enter foster care already have educational issues related to learning disabilities or emotional and behavioral problems connected to abuse or neglect. In addition, the disruption in their families will often generate additional school-related problems, including academic difficulties, emotional disturbances, and behavioral changes.

Keeping children in their neighborhood schools after placement may be the one constant at a time of disruption and change. Children who are struggling to adjust to a new family and new home can take some comfort in contact with familiar teachers, peers, and routines.

How can children remain in their neighborhood schools after removal or changes in placement?

Concentrate Recruitment Efforts for New Foster Families in Those Communities in Which Placement Rates Are the Highest

- Reach out to community organizations that tend to draw local people such as parent–teacher associations, community or parks clean-up/beautification groups, and church groups.
- Target recruitment efforts toward a population that reflects the identity of children entering care.

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- If the community has a large percentage of people speaking a language other than English, place your message in the media (e.g., newspapers, radio, television) in that language.

Make a Commitment to Keeping Children in the Same School Whenever Possible

- State your policy clearly. Make sure placement staff understands the seriousness of the commitment.
- Remember that not every child needs to, or should, remain in contact with his or her original school. Each child should be individually evaluated to determine whether there are family or school-related issues indicating that it would be preferable to have the child begin fresh at a new school.

How can agencies and schools work together to address the needs of foster children, especially when the foster or birth families have limited experience in working within the educational system?

Invite School Districts to Become Partners in Permanency Planning

- Educate administrators about the many challenges facing children in foster care.
- Work on plans that may enable children to remain in their own schools if placement puts them in another school's jurisdiction.
- Invite each school district in which you place children to help you prepare a calendar for foster parents. Schools can contribute dates for registration, meetings, school holidays, and their contact information. You can add agency information such as training opportunities and your contact information. Pictures of school scenes or student art can enliven the calendar and encourage foster parents to keep it in a prominent place.

When changes in schools are necessary, how can everyone involved contribute toward making the transition smoother?

Sometimes it is simply not possible to keep the child in the same school. When changes are necessary, the agency, the schools, and the foster parents can all take steps to ease the adjustment for the child.

Ask the Schools to Cooperate in Making the Transition Easier

- Work with schools to prepare transfer protocols. Establish checklists of information and papers that can be sent to a new school.
- In addition to the standard paperwork involved in any school transfer, ask administrators to work with teachers in selecting more personal information to be passed on to the new school. A note to the new teacher or a selection of the child's artwork or poetry can accompany the child at the time of the move. A teacher may wish to send a card or banner signed by classmates to recognize a holiday or birthday that falls soon after the move.
- When appropriate for the child, the school may be willing to engage in educational classroom-to-classroom communications as a way for the child to stay in touch with friends. Writing letters to pen pals is still a good way for children to practice reading and writing skills. Some schools may wish to update this practice to use technology such as e-mail or website design as the means of communication.

Make Sure Foster Parents Are Aware of the Opportunities Available

- Your agency may have a good working relationship with a school or district and have transfer protocols established. If so, foster parents need to know what they can reasonably expect the school and the teacher to do.
- Develop a checklist for foster parents. List all the steps they should take to ensure that the child's records are transferred in a timely manner.

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How can the agency present information about educational testing, assessment, IEPs, and other services and supports to foster parents in ways that are easily accessible and can be referenced when needed?

Know What Materials Schools Provide

- If possible, assign a staff member to act as a liaison with school districts in your area. Or ask a knowledgeable foster parent to take on that role.
- School districts are required to make information available to all parents. Make sure your agency has copies of these materials and understands them.
- Make sure foster parents receive these materials, either from the schools or from your agency.
- Develop a relationship with school administrators. Ask them to keep you informed about changes in policies or written materials.
- Get on the school district's mailing list. Make sure you receive notices about informational meetings and training sessions offered by the school.

Prepare Your Own Materials

School materials will probably not address some issues faced by foster parents, particularly concerning changes in schools, and ways that loss and grief issues may affect school performance or behaviors.

- Prepare a list of "frequently asked questions" along with the answers. Ask foster parents to help you develop the list!
- List any special services, such as student support groups, provided by schools.
- Give foster parents a resource list for more information. Provide contact information (e.g., name, address, phone, fax, e-mail) for persons who can answer questions. This may include someone in your agency, knowledgeable foster parents, staff at the individual school or school district level, and the state department of education.

- Distribute information in multiple formats. Leaflets, laminated cards, checklists for posting on the refrigerator, and a website could all contain the same list of services and contacts.

Review Plans and Services

The responsibility for ensuring that educational services are appropriate and adequate remains with the agency. Review educational services and IEPs on a regular basis.

How can the agency prepare foster parents to become advocates within the school system?

Help Foster Parents Overcome Apprehension

Many adults are uncomfortable dealing with educators, often because of their own school experiences or because they feel intimidated by "professionals" in the field.

- Provide information about and practice in assertiveness techniques.
- Encourage positive interaction with school staff by facilitating joint trainings and asking schools to make brief presentations on subjects of interest to foster parents.
- Help empower foster parents by giving them the information they need and encouraging them to use it.
- Encourage foster parents to attend school functions such as orientations, parent–teacher conferences, and "back to school night."
- Suggest that foster parents who have time available volunteer, either in individual classrooms or in school libraries, nursing offices, and other areas.

Provide Training Opportunities

- Present information on common school-related problems (e.g., homework, failure, bullying, or cheating) along with guidelines for handling them.

- Include basic information about working with the educational system in preservice training. Provide more in-depth information in specialized inservice trainings focused on specific age groups, issues, or problems.

Provide Less Formal Opportunities for Foster Parents to Hear About and Discuss School-Related Issues

- Facilitate meetings in which experienced foster parents and school staff can make brief presentations and then answer questions.
- If you have foster parents who are skilled at working with the school system, ask them to act as mentors or buddies to those who are less comfortable or experienced.

How can foster parents serve as mentors to birth parents in this role?

Many birth parents do not have a positive relationship with their children's schools. Some have had negative experiences as students themselves. Some have had little or no contact with the schools their children attend; or they have had an adversarial relationship with a teacher, counselor, or administrator. Others do not value education highly or do not understand the impact of parental involvement. One of the many ways that foster parents can serve as mentors and models to birth parents is in the role of supporter and advocate in school issues. Following are some ways foster parents can accomplish this with your support and encouragement.

Keep Birth Parents Informed

To adults who have no contact with schools, or negative feelings about them, what happens inside the school building may be a mystery. Caseworkers and foster parents can make sure birth parents are well informed about the school.

- Copies of class schedules, lunch menus, and a school calendar put parents in better touch with what is happening in the child's life on a daily basis.

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- The child should be encouraged to share stories about the school day with parents in phone calls and during visitation.
- The child's written work and art can be passed on to the parents each week or collected in a book for review at regular intervals.

Present Their Own Contacts With the School System in a Positive Light

Foster parents (and caseworkers!) can convey information about the child's teacher, classroom, and school experiences with enthusiasm and interest.

Expect Birth Parents to Take an Active Role

Include actions in the service plan that require the involvement of the parents in the child's educational experience, such as signing report cards.

Give Foster Parents Suggestions for Involving Birth Parents in School Issues

- Encourage foster parents to invite birth parents to join them in school functions, such as parent–teacher conferences, school plays, chaperone on school trips, "class mother," and other events.
- Some foster parents may be willing to invite birth parents into their homes to participate in homework supervision, spelling drills, reading, or other learning activities.
- Children can telephone parents on a regular basis or to report special accomplishments.

Ideas to Think About: Defining Community Around Schools

In 1992 the Annie E. Casey Foundation, consulting with national experts in child welfare, designed and funded the *Family to Family* initiative as an opportunity for states and counties to develop innovative family foster care service systems. One of the goals of the initiative was "to develop a network of family foster care that is more neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and located primarily in the communities where the children live" (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1997b, p. 6).

Anne Arundel County in Maryland consists of 416 square miles on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay. The 1999 population of 475,464 is largely suburban and rural. When the state of Maryland joined the *Family to Family* foster care initiative in 1994, counties were faced with the task of developing neighborhood-based family foster care service systems. Whereas urban areas can define community around neighborhood centers, settlement houses, or even zip codes, Anne Arundel County found itself without a simple definition. Its solution was to divide the county into the areas used to define populations for its twelve public high schools.

When children enter foster care, one of the primary placement considerations is to allow them to stay in the same school. In order to achieve that goal, the following steps were taken:

- The county is divided into 12 school-centered "communities."
- Placements are made, whenever possible, in the same "community" in which the child's family lives. In order to do this, the county started tracking the location of those families whose children entered foster care, as well as the location of the placements. This provided valuable knowledge concerning the need for placements in different parts of the county.
- Foster parent recruitment is targeted to those "communities" showing a need for placements. One recruitment method being used is to ask current foster parents considered to be skilled and effective to invite friends and neighbors to small gatherings held at their church or other community site, or even at home. The agency brings its recruitment message, conducting individualized orientations for these small groups.
- Within each "community" there may be more than one elementary or middle school, and a child may have to be placed in a family whose location falls under the jurisdiction of a school other than the home school. Working with the school districts, the agency has developed a plan that allows foster parents who are willing to do so to transport children to their home schools.
- When it is not possible to place a child in his or her home "community," the agency attempts to find a placement as geographically close to the home as possible.
- Each school-defined community has a foster parent who acts as a coordinator of all foster families within the area.
- The agency is working toward the ability to have permanency planning workers assigned to individual community areas.

- Schools (usually at the elementary level) that have multidisciplinary teams include agency staff as part of the team. Counselors and other school staff may also participate in agency multidisciplinary meetings.
- Foster parents are encouraged to develop relationships at their local schools.

Chris Seipp, Coordinator for Out of Home Care, reports that the agency believes these and other changes made under the *Family to Family* program have been good for children, good for families, and good for agency staff. Benefits of the effort have included the following:

- The agency has been able to increase its knowledge about the demographics of child welfare in the county.
- Because most foster children are placed geographically close to their birth parents, it is easier to facilitate visitation.
- Short distances between foster and birth families have also enabled the agency to successfully encourage contact between the families. Foster parents serve as mentors to birth parents working toward reunification, and families participate in a variety of activities together.

Anne Arundel County's contact for information about the *Family to Family* program is

Chris Seipp
Department of Social Services
P.O. Box 2665
Annapolis, MD 21401
Phone: 410/222-7825
Fax: 410/222-7855

You can learn more about the entire *Family to Family* initiative from their website at www.aecf.org/familytofamily or by contacting

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul St.
Baltimore, MD 21202
Phone: 410/547-6600
Fax: 410/547-6624
E-mail: webmail@aecf.org

CHECKLIST ON SCHOOL SUPPORT

Focus on the Child in Placement

YES	NO	
—	—	The child is in the same school as before. If "no," the reason is: ___ No placement was available in the same school district. ___ The child's interest is better served in a different school.
—	—	If the child has changed schools, transfer protocols have been followed on a timely basis.
—	—	The foster parent has received a school schedule or calendar.
—	—	The foster parent has received a list of education contacts.
—	—	If appropriate, the foster parent has received information about IEPs or other special services.
—	—	Training opportunities on working with the school system have been made available to the foster parent.
—	—	The case plan addresses the need for the parent to evidence some involvement in the child's education. If "no," the reason is:
—	—	You have talked to the foster parent about sharing school-related activities with the birth parent.
—	—	Does the child have an IEP? If "yes," review is scheduled for:

Foster Parent as Recruiter, Trainer, and Mentor to New Foster Parents

As agencies expand their view of foster parents to consider them as partners in permanency rather than simply temporary caregivers, they come to understand that foster parents can serve as advocates in the community for foster care. Who better to spread the message of the satisfactions derived from fostering than the people who have experienced them firsthand?

> ***How can we identify those foster parents who best represent the message and the image we want to present to the public?***
>
> Every person and every family has both strengths and weaknesses. Some families, including those whose strength may lie in excellent parenting skills or the ability to handle difficult children, may not be good at or comfortable with roles that place them in the position of advocacy or require public speaking.

Evaluate All of Your Foster Families

Regardless of any plan you may have to employ foster parents as recruiters, trainers, or mentors, you should have in place a system of evaluation that enables you to assess the abil-

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ity of your foster families to satisfactorily handle their other roles. Only families who are considered effective and skilled at those roles should be considered.

- Define specific competencies by describing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes you want your foster families to achieve.
- Provide training and resources that enable foster families to achieve those competencies.
- Establish methods to evaluate families' effectiveness in each competency.
- Determine a timeframe for periodic review and use it to assess families regularly.

Establish a Minimum Requirement for Length of Experience

Parents should have several years' experience at fostering before they are considered for these roles. They should have a lot of knowledge about working within the child welfare system and should know how to work with other community resources such as the education, medical, and court systems.

Request Nominations

Ask permanency planning staff members to suggest foster parents who work well with the agency, do a good job for the children in their care, and may have the abilities and desire to expand their role. Your local foster parent's association may also be able to give recommendations.

Observe Training Sessions or Ask for Feedback From Trainers

In-service training sessions are an ideal time to observe experienced foster parents. Questions to consider include: Which foster parents

- are comfortable speaking in a group?
- communicate their points clearly and concisely?
- are able to share their own experiences and concerns freely?
- demonstrate a desire to learn and grow?

Seek Diversity

Try to find families to fill this role that reflect the demographics of your community. Think about race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, marital status, and age.

How can foster parents act as recruiters of new potential foster parents?

Current foster parents can take part in your recruitment efforts in both active and passive roles. Following are some of the ways they may be able to help.

Ask for Individual Referrals

Remind foster parents at every opportunity that there is always a need for new families willing to care for children.

- Mention the need at every training and meeting.
- Include a notice with every mailing.
- Provide a small stipend to foster parents who recruit other foster parents.

Ask Foster Families to Invite Their Peers to Small Recruiting Sessions

- Some families may be willing to have friends and neighbors come to their homes for coffee and a brief presentation on fostering.
- Ask foster parents to invite fellow church members to a session held at the church.
- Other groups to which foster parents may belong may be willing to host a session. Find out what kinds of organizations your foster parents belong to. Maybe a book or gardening club, a bowling league, or a youth sports association will be your host.

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Ask Foster Parents to Participate in Media Efforts

- A foster family may agree to be interviewed for an article in a local newspaper.
- A foster parent might join you in a local radio call-in talk show.
- Foster families who do not wish to take on a speaking role may be willing to have their photographs used for promotional purposes.

How can we develop and present training that makes the best use of foster parent expertise?

Foster parents can serve as co-facilitators at preservice and inservice training sessions. Their experience with children and with the system and their ability to relate to participants in the session allow you to present a very personal perspective to the audience.

Identify Appropriate Subject Matter

Determine what kinds of material are best suited for presentation by foster parents rather than (or in addition to) agency staff. Some areas you might consider include the following:

- behavior management techniques,
- working with the foster care agency (including the foster parent's place on the permanency planning team, working with the caseworker, and working with birth parents),
- working with other systems (e.g., education, courts, doctors),
- rights and responsibilities,
- rewards and disadvantages of fostering, and
- handling crises.

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Standardize Your Training Materials

When lesson plans are not documented, each facilitator will present her own idea of what the material should be. Put all of your training in written formats that are easy to follow and that lead the facilitators through the material in the way you want it presented.

Provide "Train the Trainer" Sessions

- Teach foster parents basic platform training skills.
- Make sure they feel comfortable both with the training situation and with the material they will be presenting.

Pair Foster Parents With Staff Trainers

Unless a foster parent has presented material several times in an effective manner, always have a staff member co-facilitate the training. This helps you present both the agency's and the foster parent's point of view.

Request and Use Feedback

All training should be evaluated. When foster parents facilitate, consider using some or all of the following feedback mechanisms:

- Have participants in the training complete a satisfaction survey that includes questions about their ability to relate to and understand facilitators.
- Have facilitators (staff member and foster parent) assess themselves and one another, as well as how well they felt they were able to work together.
- For foster parents who have not presented for you before, consider having a staff member sit in on the training and complete an evaluation of the foster parent's skills. This can be tied to the Train the Trainer curriculum and may lead to follow-up skills training.

In what ways can experienced foster parents serve as mentors to families who are new to fostering?

A mentor is defined as "a wise and trusted counselor or teacher" (Soukhanov, 1996). When we approach the question of how experienced foster parents can serve as mentors, we can focus on the adjectives "wise" and "trusted."

Select Foster Parents With Experience

Wisdom comes from (among other things) experience. Foster parents should have served for several years and cared for several children before they are considered for the mentoring role.

Provide References and Resources

Wisdom is also knowledge. If mentors are to pass along information to others, you must be sure they know their facts. Give them easy-to-use reference materials so that they can quickly respond to questions of fact from mentees.

- Provide a manual that contains both resources and lists of procedures to follow in a wide variety of situations.
- Use a loose-leaf format so that pages can be added or revised easily.
- Make the manual attractive enough to keep in sight near a telephone or on a bookshelf.
- Make sure the names and phone numbers included are checked and updated regularly.

Train Mentors in Their Role

To be trusted, mentors must feel secure in the role. Do not expect foster parents to know how to mentor just because they know how to parent.

- Offer group training if you can. Include practice activities such as role playing and "what if" scenarios.

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- Provide guidelines for interaction. Let mentors know how often they should check with mentees. Give them a list of subjects on which to focus conversation.
- Once you have a group of mentors performing the role for a while, include them as facilitators in training new mentors.

Include Training in Relationship Skills

Many effective foster parents are probably highly skilled in dealing with other people simply by virtue of their personal traits. But it cannot hurt to include some information about and practice in the same kinds of skills often included in caseworker training such as empathy, genuineness, nonverbal communication skills, and reflection. These are the skills that will help the mentor establish trust with the new foster parent.

Empower Mentors

New foster parents will trust mentors who present themselves with confidence. Help mentors believe that they have valuable knowledge and skills to pass on by first making sure your staff believes it. Here are some ways you can display your confidence in the skills of your mentors:

- Allow mentors (and all foster parents) to trust your commitment to their strengths. Treat them as valuable members of the permanency planning team.
- Let new foster parents know that mentors are valued and trusted by the agency.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep. Do not break promises you make.
- Do not let mentors feel abandoned. Return phone calls promptly. Have an emergency number for night and weekend crises. If you do not know the answer to a question, find it.
- Say "thank you" often.
- Recognize success publicly and privately.
- Make being a mentor a role to which foster parents aspire.

Ideas to Think About: Foster Parent Mentor Program

In January 1999 the Training Resource Center at Murray State University, in cooperation with the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children, launched a pilot foster parent mentoring program. The program was developed as a way to address the need to improve the retention rate of foster families in the state.

New foster parents in the pilot regions are recruited, trained, and approved for service by the Department of Community Based Services. Their names are then given to the Training Resource Center, which invites them to participate in the program. Participation is voluntary, but the response rate is quite good because new foster parents are generally eager to make use of any supports that can be offered to them.

Those who respond are asked to complete a questionnaire that asks for information about foster children for whom the family is willing to care (e.g., age group) and family interests, hobbies, ethnicity, and other factors. This questionnaire (see page 66) is used to match the new foster family with a mentor in the same geographic vicinity and with similar interests.

Mentors are foster parents with a minimum of three years' experience and are recommended to the program by their supervisors. If they agree to participate, they meet with the program coordinator individually or in small groups to learn the duties and requirements of their role.

Once matched, mentors call the new foster family and arrange at least one face-to-face meeting. After that the mentor is responsible for contacting the new foster family once a week for a period of 6 months. Those contacts, usually by telephone, give new foster families the opportunity to ask questions, share concerns, and receive a personal level of support. Mentors also agree to be available for calls during agreed-upon hours. Questions they cannot answer are referred to the agency.

The Cabinet for Families and Children uses the Child Welfare Institute's "12 skills of successful foster parenting," which are presented in the group preparation and selection process for new foster families. When mentors call new foster parents they use these skills to guide their conversation, recording which skills are addressed in each conversation. This reinforces the importance of the skills and helps to focus the mentoring relationship around them. The twelve skills are:

1. know your own family,
2. communicate effectively,
3. know the children,
4. build strengths and meet needs,

5. work in partnership,
6. be loss and attachment experts,
7. manage behaviors,
8. build connections,
9. build self-esteem,
10. assure health and safety,
11. assess impact (of foster parenting on your family), and
12. make informed decisions on whether to foster or adopt.

An individual may serve as a mentor to a maximum of two families at a time. Many mentors complete the 6-month relationship and agree to participate again with a new family. Some mentor-mentee pairs have continued their friendship on their own when the formal relationship concludes. It is the hope of the program coordinator that, as mentees complete 3 years of fostering, they will volunteer to serve as mentors to future foster parents. Mentors receive a small monthly stipend and are reimbursed for telephone and travel expenses.

Evaluation of the program is being conducted by the Department of Psychology at Murray State University and will look at issues such as whether there has been an increase in the foster parent retention rate, a decrease in calls to agency staff for information, or a decrease in requests for termination of placements. Both mentors and new foster parents complete forms evaluating the effects of their participation. Unfortunately, because the program has just completed its first year of operation at the time of this writing, results are not expected to be published for some time. Yet, informal and anecdotal information indicates that both mentors and mentees have been satisfied with their interaction, and that new foster families have valued the level of support offered to them by their mentors. The program is currently expanding into several additional regions of the state.

For more information about Kentucky's Foster Parent Mentor Program, visit their website at ceao.mursuky.edu/trc/foster.htm or contact

Sharon Rose Inman, Coordinator
Foster Parent Mentor Program
402 N. Applied Science Building
Murray State University
Murray, KY 42071
Phone: 270/762-3040
E-mail: <sharon.inman@murraystate.edu>

Pre-matching Questionnaire for New Families

Name: _____ R & C Worker: _____

Address: _____ Wife's DOB: _____Level of Education_____

_____KY _____ County:_____

Please Circle Region: Purchase Pennyrile Barren River Green River Lincoln Trail

KIPDA KIPDA Salt Family Race:_____

Home Phone:_____ Husband's DOB: _____Level of Education_____

Work Phone: _____ His _____Hers

Email Address_____

Regular Foster ☐ Foster/Adopt ☐ Special Needs ☐ Family Treatment ☐

Medically Fragile ☐ Concurrent Planning ☐ Provisional ☐

Age of children preferred to foster: 0-5 ☐ 6-12 ☐ Teens ☐ No age preference☐

Race of children placed/preferred: white☐ black ☐ hispanic ☐ bi-racial ☐

.☐Other (please specify) _____ no preference☐

Sex of children placed/preferred: male ☐ female ☐ no preference☐

Are there specific problem areas that a child may have that you feel the need for extra support?

☐Physically Challenged ☐Sexually Abused ☐Emotional Disorders
☐Mentally Challenged ☐Physically Abused ☐Behavioral Issues
☐Medically Fragile ☐Neglected ☐ADHD
☐Other _____

Number of foster children currently in the home_____

What experiences do you have with ethnic or cultural backgrounds other than your own?

What are your personal interests, spare time activities, hobbies, etc.
Husband

Wife

SOURCE: Foster Parent Mentor Program, Training Resource Center, Murray State University, Kentucky.

CHECKLIST ON TRAINING

Focus on Treating the Foster Parent as a Member of the Training Team

YES	NO	
___	___	Do we have established criteria for selecting foster parents as trainers?
		Do we view training as...
___	___	...an onerous chore?
___	___	...a necessary evil?
___	___	...an opportunity?
___	___	Do we plan training carefully, making sure the facilities, materials, and participants will all be in place?
___	___	Do we provide training in platform skills (Train the Trainer) to foster parents?
___	___	Do we give foster parent trainers complete sets of training materials to use in preparation?
___	___	Do we schedule training sessions at times convenient for foster parents?
___	___	Do we make sure foster parents who train have child care coverage?
___	___	Do other trainers treat foster parent trainers as equals in the training room?
___	___	Do we provide a stipend or other remuneration to foster parents who train?
___	___	Do we evaluate foster parent trainers?
___	___	Do we give foster parent trainers feedback on their efforts?
___	___	Do we provide special recognition for foster parent trainers?

8

Foster Parent as Mentor to Birth Parents

Foster parents know that the children they care for have been abused and neglected. They try to manage behaviors that are the result of maltreatment. They can be expected to have strong feelings about birth parents. But if those feelings are acknowledged and dealt with, and if agencies can successfully present the idea that foster families can benefit children by working with their parents, it is possible to enlist many foster parents in efforts to work directly with birth families. Foster parents can offer birth parents help, information, and even friendship in mentor–mentee relationships.

How can we recruit new foster families who are willing to work with birth families?

There are some foster parents who find it impossible to overcome their negative feelings and work effectively with birth parents. Agencies can acknowledge this and try to place children in those homes whose interest is best served by maintaining little or no contact with birth families, at least for the short term. At the same time, the agency can actively seek to recruit more families who are willing to take on a mentoring role.

Feature Mentoring in a Recruitment Campaign

Some people will be specifically motivated by the opportunity to share their parenting skills with others. Take advantage of this by addressing the issue directly in some portion of your print, radio, or television advertising.

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Publicize Success Stories

- Locate a family (or families) who achieved reunification with the aid of foster parents acting as mentors and has maintained their success over a period of time.
- Ask a local newspaper to run a feature story about them. Once it is published, obtain permission to use copies of the article in information packets used for recruitment.
- Ask successful mentor–mentee pairs to attend recruiting meetings in the community and speak about their relationship.

How can we persuade caseworkers to include mentoring as part of their service planning when appropriate?

Before you can overcome foster parent hesitancy about working with birth parents, you must first convince staff that this is a good idea. Some caseworkers will be opposed to trying this approach, particularly if they have long experience with a system that separates birth and foster families.

Make a Systemwide Commitment to Cooperation

Individual caseworkers (and foster parents) will not participate in an effort that is not supported at all levels of the organization.

Overcome Resistance to Change

Remember that it is the nature of human beings to resist change, regardless of what is being changed. There are many models that deal with change, resistance, and steps to overcoming resistance. Your organization may already have a favorite model, or you may have to select one that fits your agency culture and methods of operation. Whatever model you choose, be sure to include the following actions:

- Acknowledge that change is difficult.
- Know what motivates your staff. Present the change in a way that speaks to their motivation.

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- Measure change in small steps. Do not expect a total revision in behavior all at once.
- Recognize success at each step.

Train Your Staff

Do not assume that caseworkers will be able to incorporate mentoring relationships into their service plans without training. Knowledge and skills that need to be presented to your staff include the following:

- Knowledge about the mentoring role—workers should understand the concept of mentor as "wise and trusted counselor or teacher" (Soukhanov 1996). Mentoring includes an element of personal relationship that goes beyond the transfer of knowledge.
- Skills in relationship-building—in order to prepare foster parents to be mentors and to monitor the ongoing relationship, caseworkers need to model and pass on the skills that build trust such as empathy, genuineness, nonverbal communication, and good listening skills.
- Knowledge about how to include goals, objectives, and activities related to mentoring in the service plan—give caseworkers practice in recognizing the types of problems that can be addressed through mentoring and identifying specific activities mentors can work on with birth parents.

Define the Scope of Your Mentoring Program

There are a variety of ways that foster parents can serve as mentors to birth parents. Although many may work in your community, it is best to start with a program that limits expectations and has specific goals. As you work out problems and gain experience you can add more pieces at a later time. In addition, some foster parents will inevitably expand their own role as they build a relationship with birth parents.

- Determine location—foster and birth parents might meet at agency offices, the foster family home, or at the office of a service provider such as a hospital or school.
- Determine issues to be covered—mentoring relationships can be limited to specific knowledges and skills such as infant care, toddler development, discipline, school, or getting along with your teenager.

- Determine type and frequency of contact—providing a schedule for phone calls or personal visits ensures that contact will occur often enough to be effective and protects the foster family from the possibility that the birth family may become too demanding.
- Determine a timeline—all foster care placements should be framed by the goal of achieving permanence as quickly as possible and within the guidelines of The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. Mentoring relationships should be even further constrained by time limits that define goals for all the parties. Foster families are entitled to an assurance that their efforts can be expected to have specified effects within a reasonable period of time.
- Consider preparing a contract between foster and birth parents—use their input to prepare the terms. Set short-range goals that can be updated as they are achieved.

Sites involved in the *Family to Family* initiative use a four-step process (Annie E. Casey 1997c, pp. 36–40) to gradually bring birth and foster families closer together. A summary of the stages, along with tips that social workers, foster parents, and birth parents can use at each stage is reproduced beginning on page 90.

How can we prepare foster families for working with birth families on a wide range of issues including child care, child development, educational needs, health, and discipline?

As mentors, foster parents will have opportunities to teach, demonstrate, and model parenting skills in many areas of the child's life. Some skills may be specifically addressed in the service plan and directed toward the goals of reunification. Yet, there may be other opportunities for mentors to pass on their expertise in a less formal or unplanned manner. For example, a mentoring relationship may be focused on effective and appropriate disciplinary techniques, but the foster mother finds that she can also guide the birth mother's interactions with the child in other ways. She may suggest that they read a story to the child at naptime or take a walk after lunch instead of watching television.

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Include Mentoring Competencies in Your Initial Assessment Process

As potential foster parents proceed through the joint assessment process, include opportunities to mutually evaluate their knowledge and skills in these areas.

- Have foster parents complete a self-assessment, using a checklist or list of competency statements to indicate how comfortable they feel with their ability to (1) use knowledge and skills in parenting and (2) model or teach others.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses during both group preparation and individual home study visits.
- Work together to create a family development plan that builds on strengths and develops areas of weakness.

Identify Current Foster Families Who Have Demonstrated Competence in a Variety of Areas

Success over time and with children of different ages and needs is a good indication that a family has the knowledge and skills you want them to teach and model.

Prepare a Comprehensive Resource Manual

In almost any job, new workers are given some type of manual that contains rules, procedures, background information, and resources. Mentor foster families can benefit from having such a guide to the role they are being asked to take on. Your manual might include sections on subjects such as the following:

- child development;
- nutrition, food shopping, menu planning, and basic cooking techniques;
- how to childproof your home;
- hygiene;
- medical information such as vaccination schedules, caring for a sick child, symptoms of childhood diseases, and when to call a doctor;
- behavior management;
- school issues such as how to promote good study habits;
- listening skills;

- agency policies;
- foster parent rights and responsibilities;
- birth parent rights and responsibilities; and
- resources and supports.

Provide Training Opportunities

Some foster parents may wish to learn more about some of the topics you will expect them to model or teach, or may feel they need an opportunity to refresh skills they have not used often or in a long time.

- Training may be available through resources in your community, or you may want to conduct some training yourself.
- Foster parents who have served as mentors can share their knowledge and skills as well as their experience in the mentoring process.

How can we help foster families work in a positive manner with birth parents who have abused or neglected their children?

When initially faced with children who have been abused or neglected, most people are repulsed and wonder, "How can anyone do that to a child?" In order to get foster parents past that reaction, we must help them understand abuse and neglect in the same ways child welfare professionals have been trained to do so.

Use Training to Help Foster Parents Understand

Issues that should be addressed include the following basic points:

- stresses sometimes lead to abuse or neglect;
- the cycle of family violence can perpetuate itself;

- parents do what they learned as children;
- most parents love their children and do not want to hurt them;
- most children love their parents and want to be with them, even if they have been abused and neglected;
- all families have strengths as well as weaknesses.

Build Empathy

Give foster parents an opportunity to hear birth parents' stories and do the following:

- Identify birth parents whose children were removed for abuse or neglect and who later achieved reunification.
- Ask these birth parents to present their stories at training sessions.
- With permission, videotape interviews, conversations, or "confessional" monologues in which birth parents talk about their experience. Use the tapes in recruitment or training.
- Do the same with former foster children who can discuss both positive and negative experiences with their families.

Focus on the Needs of the Child

Help foster parents understand these points:

- Most children want to live with their parents.
- Contacts between parents and children support their connection during placement and improve the likelihood of reunification.
- Children identify with their parents; when a foster family rejects or speaks negatively about the birth family, the child feels rejected.
- Foster parents can help birth parents improve their ability to care for their child.

How can we match children and foster families in ways that best suit both the family's ability and willingness to work with birth parents and the child's specific needs?

For any relationship to work, there must be some common ground between the parties. In foster care the basis of the mentor-mentee relationship revolves around the child and the goal of reunification. This is a powerful motivator and will go a long way toward establishing a bond between the two families. But that process can be made even easier if there are other considerations that help the families establish comfort and trust fairly quickly.

The Utah Division of Family Services and the Northern Region of the Utah Department of Human Services, Office of Social Services conducted a pilot reunification project during 1990 to 1991. Foster parents (termed "peer parents") were reimbursed for direct contact with birth parents during the period immediately preceding and up to 2 months following the return of children to their homes. Among the other findings of the evaluation of this project were the following opinions (Lewis & Callaghan, 1993, p. 57).

The Ideal Peer Parent

According to respondents, characteristics of the ideal peer parent may include the following:

- experienced with the agency so that they have realistic expectations about policies of what constitutes an appropriate situation for returning foster children home;
- successful parents that present as credible role models;
- strength and intelligence;
- having some formal child development education;
- nonjudgmental and nurturing;

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- having the ability to get along well with all types of people, accepting, and broad-minded;
- persistent, have "thick skins," and will not give up when obstacles are encountered;
- team players who have a good understanding of the policy but can also work independently;
- assertive but sensitive with good communication skills; and
- able to teach one-on-one.

Children and Families Most Likely to Benefit from a Peer Parent Relationship

Respondents were in agreement that families most likely to benefit from peer parenting are those

- with pre-pubescent children;
- who are victims of physical abuse, neglect, or lack of supervision; and
- where birth parents have weak social support networks or lack parenting skills.

Families with ungovernable adolescents or sexual abuse cases were seen as typically less likely to benefit from the program. Following are some issues you may wish to consider in matching families in mentoring relationships.

Contact Should be Convenient

Families should be able to access one another easily and inexpensively.

- Families should live as geographically near to one another as possible.
- Both families should be able to access transportation that will bring them together quickly and at a minimum expense.
- Telephone calls between the homes should be at local, not long distance, rates.

Birth Parents Should Feel Comfortable With Viewing Mentors as Role Models

Mentor families should have some characteristics that enable the foster families to view them as persons to emulate.

- Although it is not essential, it may be easier for birth families to accept direction from foster parents who are older and more experienced than themselves.
- Birth families who can see themselves reflected in the foster family may find it easier to form a relationship. Matching on race, ethnicity, religion, or language may help to establish a faster bond.
- For some mentoring relationships you may want to match families with children of similar ages. This allows the two families to participate together in activities such as picnics or athletic events.
- Other relationships might be better forged when the foster family has older children who can themselves be viewed as models for the birth family's children.

Reunification Must be Everyone's Goal

- The birth family should be committed to doing whatever it takes to regain custody of the child.
- The foster family should not be working against the relationship by secretly hoping that the child will become available for adoption.
- The rest of the case plan should provide the support and resources the birth family needs to achieve the objectives that will lead to reunification.

Substance Abuse Must be Dealt With

For too many children, parental substance abuse stands in the way of reunification. The nature of addiction, whether to drugs or to alcohol, is such that we cannot expect parents to become straight and sober just to regain custody of their children. They need a high level of services and support in order to achieve sobriety.

One approach to substance abuse is to use intensive treatment to give mothers who are able to change the opportunity to do so. The Cuyahoga County Department of Child and Family Services in Ohio developed such a tool, the Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Team (START), as a demonstration *Family to Family* project. In this team approach, each family

is served by a supervisor, a social worker, and a family advocate. Table 3 contains a summary of practice changes expected from implementation of the program (Annie E. Casey Foundation 1997d, p. 22).

Table 3. Summary of Practice Changes

Practice Changes	Impact on the Way Services Are Provided to Clients
Family advocate who is a recovering addict works with the client	Advocate relates to experiences of the clients
START team and treatment providers jointly plan and work the case	Drug assessment and treatment are quickly available
START team takes client to first treatment appointments	Treatment worker notifies START team if client misses treatment
START team works with other agencies to provide additional needed services	Family receives other services such as medical and housing assistance
Child welfare intake workers treat all positive toxicity referrals as emergencies	Mother is quickly identified for services, receives needed support, and is held more accountable Intake and START teams have joint meeting with mother during first week
START team visits client weekly	Ongoing support is provided to mother, and timely intervention is possible

For more information about START, contact

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul St.
Baltimore, MD 21202
Phone: 410/547-6600
Fax: 410/547-6624
website: www.aecf.org

Ideas to Think About: Shared Family Care

Family Support Services of the Bay Area is a private, nonprofit agency that provides respite, family preservation, and other services to families in the San Francisco Bay area. One of their programs is named Ukama, which means "extended family" in the language of the Shona people of Zimbabwe. Ukama is part of a larger program, Shared Family Care, developed in collaboration with the National Abandoned Infants Assistance Resource Center (NAIARC) at the University of California at Berkeley. The Ukama program's goal is to recruit mentor families who

- are willing to host a mentee family;
- can offer a private and safe living space for the mentee family within the family home;
- can offer a clean and sober environment; and
- is nonjudgmental and sensitive to the diversity of families the program serves.

Mentor family members 18 years and older are fingerprinted and asked to submit a criminal background check.

Shared Family Care programs in several states are placing children and their parents together in the homes of host families who serve as mentors in parenting, household management, and other independent living skills. Children are not separated from their parents, and parents are given opportunities to improve their ability to care for their children in a safe environment.

In Alameda County, California, the Ukama program began in December 1998 with an intensive effort that resulted in the completion of written manuals for both host families (mentors) and client families (mentees). The first placement was made in October 1999, and there are currently three client families who were referred to the program by the Alameda County Social Services Agency, Children and Families Division.

Client families move into the mentor's home for a period of six to nine months. During that time they continue to care for their children while the mentor family teaches, models, and demonstrates the skills mentees need in order to improve their parenting. This may include areas such as effective parenting, household management, good nutrition, working with the school system, conflict resolution, and disciplinary techniques. At the same time, an Ukama social worker provides support services and resources that enable the mentees to resolve personal issues such as substance abuse and homelessness.

Family Support Services of the Bay Area is responsible for recruiting, training, and supervising mentor families. Mentor families receive 20 hours of training in a five-session curriculum:

- Session I: Becoming a Shared Family Care Mentor
- Session II: The Mentoring Relationship
- Session III: Family and Substance Abuse Issues
- Session IV: Teaching, Modeling, and Demonstrating
- Session V: A Training Review

Mentor families also receive training in first aid and CPR. They receive continuing support from the program coordinator of the Ukama program and attend monthly support group sessions with other mentors. They receive a stipend to help cover their expenses.

Such a program is not inexpensive; budgetary considerations in Alameda County currently allow for only five mentoring relationships to be funded at any one time. Still, overall costs of preserving the family unit in this way may prove to be reasonably comparable to more traditional efforts that may entail longer foster care placements for children and services for parents. Cost effectiveness is one area being evaluated by the NAIARC.

The period of mentorship is an approach to foster care that provides fostering to the whole family, not just the children. The hope is that client families will learn to improve their skills enough to retain custody of their children when they move out of the mentor's home. Continuing services are provided under the Family Support Service's Family Reclaim Program for an additional six to nine months.

Donna Austin Moore, program director for Ukama, readily admits that none of the current placements are challenge-free. For starters, there will always be difficulties in melding the styles, habits, rules, and roles of any two families combined under one roof. Add to this the special issues facing mentees; each placement can be categorized as "challenging" for both families. Yet, the agency believes that the program goals of strengthening families and preventing placements are being achieved.

For more information, visit the Family Support Services website at <www.fssba-oak.org>, or an information page at www.fssba-oak.org/news.htm, or contact one of the following:

Cynthia Green, Program Coordinator
Donna Austin Moore, Program Director

Shared Family Care Ukama Program
Family Support Services of the Bay Area
Lou Fox, Executive Director
554 Grand Avenue
Oakland, CA 94610
Phone: 510/834-2443
Fax: 510/834-1548
E-mail: mgriggs@fssba-oak.org

For more information about the Shared Family Care projects of the NAIARC, visit the center's website at cssr.berkeley.edu/aiarc/projects/sfc.htm or contact

Amy Price
AIA Resource Center
1950 Addison St., Suite 104
Berkeley, CA 94704-1182
Phone: 510/643-8383
Fax: 510/643-7019
E-mail: amyprice@uclink2.berkeley.edu

Building Bridges[1]

Family to Family sites use the concept of a four-part bridge to symbolize the process by which foster/adoptive families and a child's birth parents grow to span the gap between them. Each stage involves an increased degree of personal contact. We offer lists of tips below to ease passage through the stages by social workers, foster families, and birth families alike.

Stage 1: Basic Contact

All parties should understand this stage from the beginning as the minimum expected of them in taking part in the system and in maintaining a relationship with the child. *Family to Family* workers sometimes refer to this stage as the "name but no face" period; each side learns about the other but no personal meetings occur.

Tips That Social Workers Can Use

- Encourage information exchange between birth parents and foster parents.
- Have everyone exchange pictures.
- Talk positively about each set of parents to the other set.
- Schedule regular and frequent visitation.
- Arrange phone contact between the two sets of parents.
- Share all information with all four parents.
- Encourage foster parents to host sibling visits.
- Serve as a liaison between the sets of parents.
- Describe foster parents in nonidentifying terms at placement.
- Exchange monthly progress reports with both sets of parents.
- Serve as a positive role model to all the adults.
- Assist everyone in understanding cultural differences.

1. SOURCE: From Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Recruitment, Training, and Support*, The Essential Tools of Foster Care (1997: pp. 36–40).

Tips That Foster Parents Can Use

- Exchange letters and pictures with the child's family via the social worker.
- Call the child's parent on the phone and talk openly with child about family.
- Request pictures of the child's family to display in the child's room.
- Send the parents current pictures of the child.
- Share copies of homework and report cards with the family.
- Send a snack or an activity for the child's visits to the parents.
- Encourage the parent's progress and brag to the parent about the child.
- Dress up the child for visits.
- Share monthly progress reports.
- Host or arrange sibling visits.

Tips That Birth Parents Can Use

- Send cards, letters, and family pictures to the child via the social worker.
- Attend all visits and meetings.
- Attend all classes and appointments.
- Make regular contact with the social worker.
- Plan special activities for visits from the child.
- Remember the child's birthday and holidays with special gifts or events.
- Talk with the child about the separation, expressing your own feelings and encouraging expression by the child.
- Write down important information about child such as diet, routine, or habits.
- Send medical, school, and other records to the foster family via the social worker.
- Encourage the child to cooperate with placement, be polite, and obey the foster parents.
- Share critical cultural information with the foster parents.

Stage 2: Meetings on Neutral Territory

This stage enhances and builds a supportive relationship between the two sets of parents that will benefit both them and the children. It requires advance planning by social workers and sometimes involves much anxiety on everyone's part. Meetings typically occur at agency offices, play spaces, or neighborhood recreation or social centers.

Tips That Social Workers Can Use

- Ask foster and birth parents at placement if they would like to meet.
- Ensure that both sets of parents attend agency planning and preliminary meetings.
- Facilitate cross-family conversations.
- Encourage the two families to work on the child's life book together.
- Encourage birth parents to permit foster parents to call them at home.
- Set clear boundaries for contact.
- Facilitate the development of a collaborative relationship between the two sets of parents.
- Brief foster parents on the birth parent's fears, problems, and needs.
- Participate in visits.
- Talk openly with all about their concerns.
- Help each set of parents understand the problems of the other set.

Tips That Foster Parents Can Use

- Consider meeting the child's family at the time of placement.
- Transport the child to the visit site.
- Talk with the parents at the visit about the child's food preferences, school progress, play experiences, and other things.
- Encourage the parent to phone the child at your home.
- Maintain a nonthreatening attitude.

- Refer to the birth parent's child as "your child."
- Share parenting information.
- Attend staff meetings, team meetings, and reviews.
- Help the parents find community resources.
- Encourage and ensure reunification.
- Share the child's life book with the parents.
- Attend training to learn how to work directly with birth parents.
- Learn about, understand, and respect the birth parents' culture.

Tips That Birth Parents Can Use

- Discuss the child's activities with the foster family at visits.
- Share family information with the foster parents.
- Arrange phone calls to you from the child.
- Work to develop a positive relationship with the foster family.
- Talk with the foster parents at agency meetings.
- Give the foster parents your home phone number.
- Attend school meetings with foster parents.
- Help develop the child's life book.
- Include foster parents in activities during the child's visits with you.
- Avoid making unrealistic scenarios for the child's future.
- Avoid giving the child a specific date for family reunification.
- Learn about, understand, and respect the foster parents' culture.

Stage 3: Visits to the Birth Family's Home

This stage begins direct collaboration between the families to ensure the best outcome for the child. It brings the foster parents to a place they may fear, and exposes the birth parents to possible negative reactions or opinions of their lifestyle from the foster family. Tension is likely.

Tips That Social Workers Can Use

- Assist the birth parents in welcoming the foster family.
- Encourage the foster parents to transport the child personally to the home.
- Permit the foster family to invite the birth parents to attend all appointments.
- Encourage the foster parents to transport birth parents to the agency meetings and child's appointments.
- Encourage foster parents to let the birth family call the child at the foster home.
- Assist in managing and resolving any tension or conflict at the visit.

Tips That Foster Parents Can Use

- Attend parenting classes with parents.
- Cooperate with birth parents in setting visit arrangements and timing.
- Take the child to the parent's home, and pick the child up.
- Serve as the parent's mentor and role model.
- Review the child's visits with the parents.
- Give parents verbal progress reports.
- Ask the parent to come to doctor or other care appointments.
- Volunteer to transport the birth parents to meetings and appointments.

Tips That Birth Parents Can Use

- Phone the child at the foster home, and talk with the foster parents too.
- Invite the foster parents to the child's birthday party or other celebrations.
- Discuss the case plan progress with the foster parents.
- Review the child's behavior with the foster parents.
- Invite the foster parents to attend parenting classes with you.
- Ask the foster parents for help in locating community resources.
- Invite the foster parents to your home.

Stage 4: The Birth Family Visits the Child at the Foster Family's Home

This is the "come to my house" stage, the final, most intimate part of the families' relationship. When such visits become routine, the two families have built the bridge that will sustain the child's relationship with both families that care for him or her, and the birth parents will have begun assuming responsibility for parenting the child.

Tips That Social Workers Can Use

- Discuss with both sets of parents how the foster parents can help support the birth parents.
- Empower the foster parents to set limits and boundaries for contact and visits.
- Assist the foster parents in welcoming the birth parents.
- Allow the families involved to schedule all visits.
- Encourage continuing contact between the families after the child is reunited.
- Suggest that foster parents provide respite care for the birth family after reunification.

Tips That Foster Parents Can Use

- Invite the child's family to attend school programs.
- Invite the child's family to your home.

- Assist in planning the child's return to birth home.
- Serve as support to the family following reunification.
- Offer to provide respite care.
- Include the birth parents in farewell and transition activities, making the event a celebration.

Tips That Birth Parents Can Use

- Offer to take the child to appointments for the foster parents.
- Work with the foster parents to solve school problems, and include the foster parents in holiday celebrations.
- Show appreciation to the foster parents.
- Work with the foster parents to resolve any discipline problems on either side.
- Call the foster parents for help with parenting problems.
- Include the foster parents in celebrations over the child's return home.
- Allow the child to keep in contact with the foster parents after your family is reunited.

CHECKLIST ON MENTORING BIRTH PARENTS

Focus on Matching Families

YES	NO	
—	—	Is reunification the permanency goal?
—	—	Is substance abuse an issue? If "yes," how is this being addressed?
		List three goals that could be achieved through mentoring: 1. 2. 3.
—	—	Are the birth parents willing to accept suggestions and advice without becoming defensive?
—	—	Do the birth parents appear willing to learn and to improve their parenting skills?
—	—	Is the foster family nonjudgmental and accepting of differences?
—	—	Is the foster family able to nurture adults as well as children?
—	—	Is the foster family older than the birth family?
—	—	If "no," will the birth family be able to accept suggestions from younger parents?
—	—	Do the families live within a reasonable distance from one another?
—	—	Do both families have access to transportation?
—	—	Do the families have times available that enable them to meet without work or other activities conflicting?
—	—	Do the families have any interests, activities, or background in common?

Foster Parent as Facilitator of Relationship Between Child and Birth Parents

Every foster child has a relationship with his or her birth family. It does not matter if

- there is frequent visitation or none at all,
- the permanency goal is reunification or adoption, or
- the child lived with his or her family for many years or the child was removed in infancy.

For all of us, our parents are part of who we are and we carry with us memories, thoughts, hopes, and dreams about them all our lives. Children whose parents abuse or neglect them, are drug- or alcohol-dependent, or are incarcerated for criminal activity often view themselves as responsible for their own maltreatment or for their parents' inability to care for them. They feel unloved and unlovable. They feel "different" because they are in foster care. Or they may be confused about their own and their family history. The result is often low self-esteem and issues of identity. Foster parents have the opportunity to help the children in their care learn the facts about their personal histories, gain an understanding of the issues that led to their placement, resolve feelings of guilt and loss, and improve self-esteem.

How do we encourage all foster parents to value the importance of the parent-child bond, whether or not they have direct contact with birth parents?

Encourage Foster Parents to Experience the Strength of Their Own Family Ties

One of the most direct methods of helping individuals understand a concept is to enable them to experience it for themselves. Foster parent training can include a number of tools and activities that begin with a look at the individual, his or her family, and personal experiences.

- Genograms can illustrate family connections, losses, and patterns and can help the individual understand his or her family as a whole. Foster parents can draw their own genograms; class discussion provides insight into their own as well as others' family relationships.
- Ecomaps are another useful tool, giving the individual a picture of the way the family fits in the community.
- A discussion of systems theory, beginning with a look at the individual's family as a system, helps foster parents understand the ways that change impacts the lives of family members.
- An activity exploring the individual's experience with loss and grief sets the stage for understanding the losses experienced by both children and parents when removal occurs.
- Foster parents can identify their individual and family strengths as an introduction to a look at a strengths-based perspective.

Help Foster Parents Draw on Their Own Experience to Understand Other Families

Follow each activity listed above with another that focuses on a family whose children have entered foster care.

- A "typical" family in which abuse or neglect has occurred can be invented and used as an example for genograms, ecomaps, and other activities.

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- Case studies—real, composite, or invented—put a more personal face on the family being examined.
- Role plays can elicit an even deeper sense of empathy for families experiencing disruption.

Give Foster Parents Concrete Tips for Supporting the Child's Family Relationships

- Reassure children that their parents love them, even if they cannot meet their needs or care for them in their home.
- Do not speak negatively about birth families to, or in the hearing range of, children.
- Treat the possessions children bring from their homes with respect.
- Answer children's questions about their birth families honestly and with sensitivity.
- Encourage children to talk about their families.
- Encourage children to keep and display family photographs.
- Let children know it is okay to care about both birth families and foster families.

If Visitation is Part of the Plan, Let Foster Parents Know How to Provide Support for That Contact With the Birth Family

- Help children keep in touch with birth families through calls and letters.
- Have children share artwork and schoolwork with parents.
- Prepare children for visits by talking about what will happen.
- Make sure children get to meetings.
- Be courteous to birth parents.

Prepare Foster Parents for Behaviors That May Occur After Visits

Visits often bring up feelings that are difficult for the child to handle. Some children become withdrawn and uncommunicative after visits; others may cry, revert to behaviors of a younger child, or act out aggressively against others or themselves. Foster parents should

be prepared to continue to support the family relationship no matter what the immediate reaction of the child might be.

Tips for foster parents following visits include the following:

- Do not question children about visits, but let them talk if they want to.
- Accept any behaviors as long as children are not hurting themselves or others. Some children need to cry to relieve tension; some may want to sleep; others need to express anger by yelling.
- Do not criticize the parents, no matter what happened during the visit.

How do we educate both caseworkers and foster parents in the preparation and use of life books as a technique for placing the parent-child relationship in context for the child?

A life book is a collection of documents, photographs, artwork, and written material by and about the child and his or her family. It may be contained in a purchased format or created using any binder, album, notebook, or portfolio. It is a tool that enables a child to build a picture of his or her life that is continuous from birth to the present. It documents the facts of the child's life; but more importantly it provides opportunities for the child to understand those facts, process his or her feelings about them, and establish and maintain a positive self-identity.

A life book should be started for every child who enters foster care. It should tell the story of the child's life, and additions should be made whenever the child moves or a significant event occurs. The social worker, foster parents, and birth parents can all contribute information or material or can help the child work on writing pieces of his or her story.

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Make an Agencywide Commitment to the Use of Life Books

It takes time to prepare a life book and keep it up to date. Unless the agency demonstrates its belief that life books are an essential element in permanency planning, it will be difficult to get staff to follow through.

- Publish written policy regarding the use of life books.
- Hold administrators accountable for seeing that life books are prepared.
- Provide the basic materials for the life book, or provide the funds to purchase them.
- Include a quantitative analysis on the completion of life books as part of your review of (1) individual caseworkers and (2) the agency as a whole. For example, you might ask, "What percentage of children in foster care have life books?" and "What percentage of children being reunited with their families bring an up-to-date life book with them?"

Train Caseworkers to Prepare Life Books

Training should include

- what types of pages to include in the life book;
- how to write the child's story, including discussion of difficult issues such as abuse and neglect, substance abuse, mental illness, and criminal activities;
- how to use the life book as a tool to help children deal with issues such as separation, grief, adjusting to a new family, and building self-esteem; and
- working with birth and foster families to keep the life book up to date.

Train Foster Parents to Work on Life Books

- Foster parents can attend the same training that is offered to caseworkers.
- It may be beneficial to have a caseworker attend the training at the same time as several foster families with whom he is currently working. This small group can continue to act as peer helpers to one another after the training.

Include Birth Parents in the Preparation of the Life Book

- Birth parents can contribute basic materials such as pictures, a birth or baptismal certificate, and report cards.
- Birth parents may like to write a letter to the child that addresses their love for him, what the parent is doing now, and hopes for the future.
- Foster parents and birth parents can work together on parts of the life book if a mentoring relationship has been established.

Ideas to Think About: Genograms and Ecomaps

Genograms are graphical tools that present family relationships and community connections in pictorial form. Many caseworkers use them in assessment as they seek to understand the family situation and the dynamics that led the family to its contact with the child welfare system.

These tools can be useful in other ways, too. Foster parents can create their own genograms to better understand the importance and strength of family connections. When they add in the foster child, they have a visual representation of the way their family is changed. Once they understand their own family's structure, they can look at the birth family's genogram (with the child, if she is old enough) and gain some insight into the child's connections to that family.

Ecomaps, too, present an opportunity for foster families to assess both their own and the birth family's position in the community. Separate ecomaps may reflect ways in which the two families have very different relationships with other individuals and systems. With the child as the center of a large, joint ecomap, foster families may be able to identify areas of common interest, concern, and interaction that bring the families closer in their efforts to achieve permanency for the child.

Pages 97 to 101 provide some basic information on the preparation of genograms and ecomaps. You can use it to introduce these tools to families or to caseworkers who may be unfamiliar with them. The instructions are reproduced from training materials developed by The Center for Child and Family Studies, College of Social Work, at the University of South Carolina. They have been used in training child protective and permanency planning caseworkers, adult services caseworkers, and foster and adoptive parents.

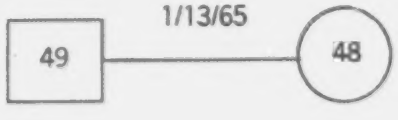
Genograms[1]

Individuals do not exist in isolation. Every individual is a member of a family. Some family members may be part of the client's household or live in such close proximity that they may as well be living together. Other family members may be separated physically by distance or even by death, but they may be very much a part of the everyday emotional life of the family. Families are complex, both in their structure and in the dynamics by which family members relate to one another.

A genogram is a pictorial multigenerational representation of a family. Using words and symbols, it records important people and events. A genogram would, at a minimum, include three generations—children, parents, and grandparents. It includes names, birth dates, pregnancies, marriages, divorces, deaths, other ruptured relationships, losses, health, and employment. Other information important to the family will also be included—any normal or paranormal (out of the ordinary) events that have meaning to the family. It is also good to ask about nicknames; that tells a lot about how family members perceive one another. Pets may also be included.

Fairly standard symbols are used in the genogram. A male is represented by a square and a female by a circle, as shown in Figure 1. Marriages are represented by a horizontal line connecting a male and a female. Name and age or birth date may be written in the square or circle. The date of marriage may be written along the marriage line.

Figure 1



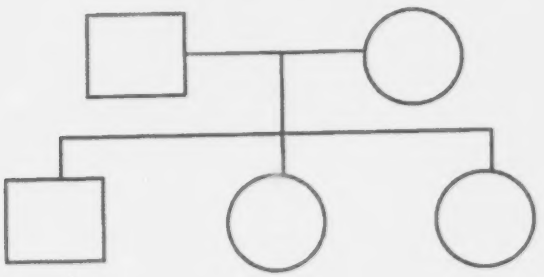
If the couple is not legally married the line will be broken, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

1. SOURCE: The Center for Child and Family Studies, College of Social Work, University of South Carolina.

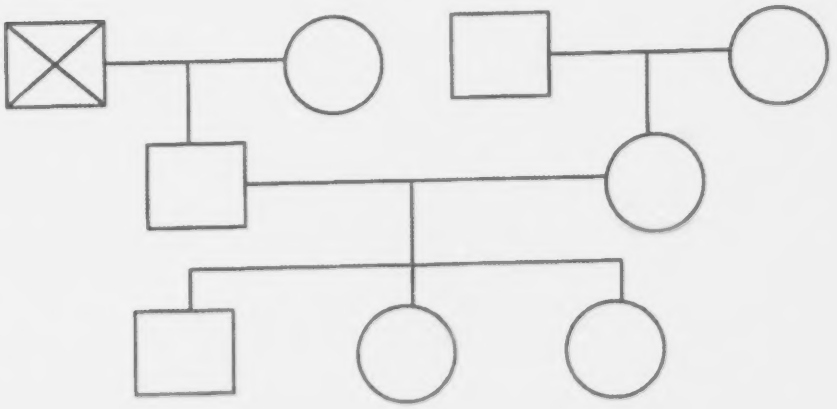
Children are represented by squares or circles along a horizontal line hanging from the marriage line. Figure 3 shows a couple with one son and two daughters.

Figure 3



Grandparents are shown using the same symbols but going above the line of the parents. Figure 4 shows a three-generational picture of a family.

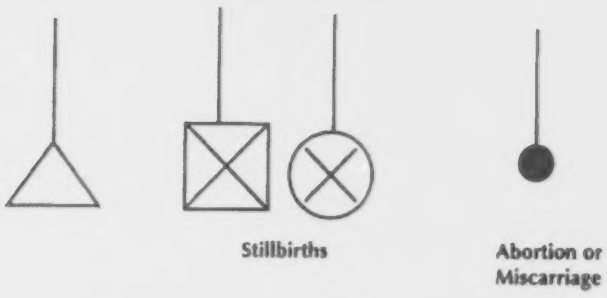
Figure 4



Deaths are represented by an "X" covering the circle or square. Figure 4 indicates that the paternal grandfather is deceased.

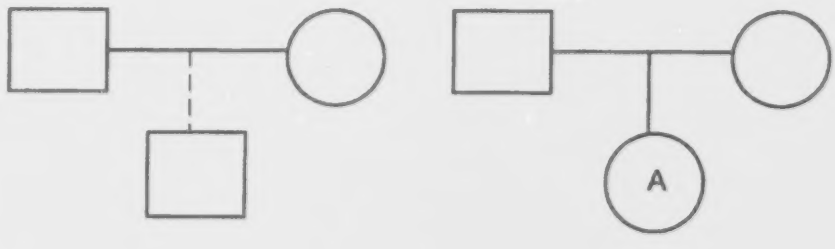
Figure 5 shows how pregnancies, stillbirths, abortions, and miscarriages can be represented.

Figure 5



As shown in Figure 6, foster or preadoptive children are connected by broken lines, and adopted children are connected with solid lines. you may indicate adoption with an "A" or write "adopted" near the line.

Figure 6



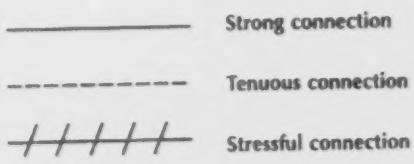
Ecomaps[1]

An ecomap is a pictorial representation of a family and the other people and groups with which it interacts.

The nuclear family system or household is first drawn in a large circle in the center of the map. Other people and organizations are represented as circles around the circumference of the family circle.

Connections between the family and other systems are shown by drawing lines. The nature of the connection can be represented by the type of line drawn, as depicted in Figure 7.

Figure 7



Connections can be between the entire family system and other systems or between individuals within the family and outside systems.

Arrows can be used to show the flow of energy, resources, and interest, as shown in Figure 8.

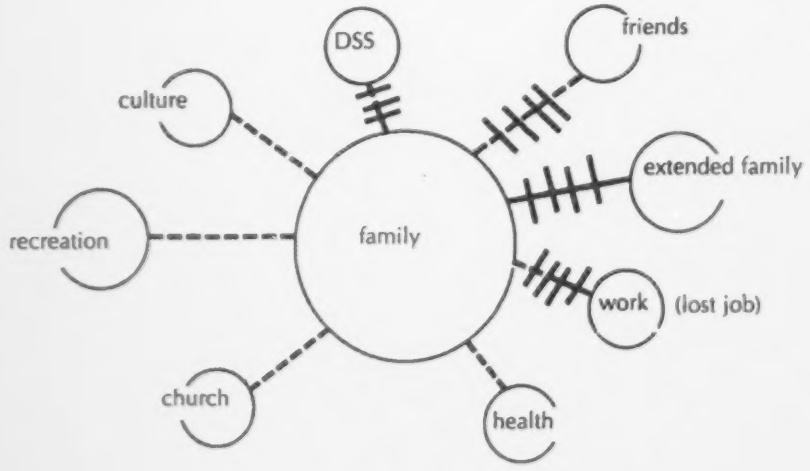
Figure 8

1. Source: The Center for Child and Family Studies, College of Social Work, University of South Carolina.

An ecomap provides a simple visual picture of a family and its relationship to other systems. It can help you organize your thoughts about the family and its problems. It can also give you insight into what is happening in the family.

Look at the ecomap in Figure 9. This is the ecomap of a family in which child abuse has occurred. Notice the lack of strong relationships (solid lines). Only the relationship with an extended family is strong, and it is conflictual. There are no strong community supports. Relationships with friends, Department of Social Services (DSS), and recreation are tenuous and conflictual. A picture develops of a family with poor social skills in terms of building relationships and probably other issues that result in constant tension in relationships. The broken line to work indicates some problems in employment, and use of health care is minimal.

Figure 9



CHECKLIST ON FACILITATING RELATIONSHIPS

Focus on Understanding Family Connections

YES	NO	
—	—	The foster family has examined its own relationships using a genogram.
—	—	The foster family has looked at the child's connections to his or her family using a genogram.
—	—	The foster family has looked at its relationship to the community using an ecomap.
—	—	The foster family understands the birth family's relationship to the community, using an ecomap.
—	—	The foster family understands how separation and loss has affected them.
—	—	The foster family understands how separation and loss has affected the child and the child's family.
—	—	The foster family can identify its own strengths.
—	—	The foster family can identify strengths in the birth family.
—	—	The foster family talks with the child about the birth family.
—	—	The foster family encourages and facilitates interaction between the child and the birth family.
—	—	The child has a life book.
—	—	The foster family has received training in the preparation and uses of the life book.
—	—	The foster family works with the child on keeping the life book up to date.
—	—	The foster family includes the birth family in work on the life book, either by asking for materials to include or by having both families work together with the child.

10 Foster Parent as Potential Adoptive Parent

In the traditional model of foster care, foster parents were not considered to be potential adoptive parents. There was an attempt made to keep the two separate. Adoption was a permanent placement; foster care could only be considered temporary. Reasons often cited for this distinction included the following:

- Workers feared that reunification efforts would be undermined by foster parents hoping to adopt children in their care.
- Workers believed that once foster parents adopted they would no longer be interested in fostering. With foster homes at a premium, agencies did not want to lose any.
- Foster placements were made with less attention to goodness of fit than adoptive placements. A family might be considered "good enough" to foster, but inadequate in some way as a permanent home for the child.
- Workers thought that foster parents could not make the adjustment from "temporary" to "permanent" and would not be able to make a lifelong commitment.
- Workers worried that the adoption of one foster child in a household might adversely affect other children who remained in temporary placements.

By the late 1970s, with growing numbers of children entering foster care and remaining in care for long periods of time, it became clear to child welfare professionals that it was necessary to find better ways to achieve permanency. Foster families were already advocating for the right to adopt children they had come to love, often after years of "temporary" care. The passage of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (P.L. 96–272) and its emphasis on permanence gave further impetus to the idea that foster parents could be an adoption resource. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105–89) encouraged the use of concurrent planning, which allows the agency to establish an alternative permanency plan at the same time the birth family is working towards reunification.

Today, foster parent adoptions are encouraged. Many agencies run preservice and preparation programs in which foster and adoptive parents take part together, or in which participants are encouraged to learn about both options before making an informed decision to do one or the other. Foster homes are often looked at as potential permanent homes in the event that reunification efforts are unsuccessful. In 1998, 65% of the children adopted from foster care were adopted by former foster parents. Another 15% were adopted by relatives (USDHHS 2000).

How do agencies clearly articulate the role of foster parents in concurrent permanency planning?

Address Concurrent Planning From the Beginning of the Family's Involvement With the Agency

- Include information about concurrent planning in preservice training for prospective foster and adoptive parents.
- Emphasize the child's needs. Present foster care, reunification, and adoption as efforts to find the best possible permanent situation for the child in a timely manner.

Help Families Make Choices

Not every family can commit to becoming a permanency resource. There are opportunities for families who are only willing to adopt as well as those who want to limit their role to temporary care.

- Encourage prospective families to consider their own needs as they decide what level of support they are able to provide to birth families and to children.
- Help families understand the difference between permanent choices (e.g., adoption), temporary choices (e.g., the family wishes to limit its involvement to short-term foster care situations for now, but may consider other options in the future), and open-ended choices (e.g., willing to foster with a potential to either send the child home or adopt).

Put it in Writing

For birth families as well as foster families, it is essential that the behavioral expectations of all the parties be documented in a written agreement, including:

- short-term immediate goals (e.g., safety);
- the long-term permanency goal;
- specific tasks and timeframes—who will do what, when, and how; and
- how and when case reviews will examine progress.

How can agencies make better matches between foster families and children, keeping in mind the permanency goal as it will affect the foster parents?

Assess the Birth Family's Strengths, Needs, and Problems

Part of this assessment process involves making a differential diagnosis. Birth families with strengths in areas of relationships, supports, and parental self-care are better candidates for reunification than those with serious problems such as substance abuse, domestic violence, criminal activity, severe mental illness, or a history of serious child abuse or neglect.

Concurrent planning originated at Lutheran Social Services of Washington and Idaho in the early 1980s, and they continue to be leaders in the field. They have developed checklists on family strengths and poor prognosis indicators for use in making differential diagnoses. These checklists are reproduced on pages 108 to 111.

Consider the Foster Family's Willingness to be a Permanency Resource

- Families who cannot see themselves working with birth families or working toward reunification can be considered as placements for situations in which termination of parental rights is expected.

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- Families with no interest in becoming permanent homes may be able to serve as resources for children who need temporary care but have a permanency plan that involves kinship care or a placement in the community.
- Children with concurrent plans should be placed in the homes of foster families who are committed to serving the needs of the child and are willing to accept whatever outcome best meets those needs.

Placements Should be Culturally Appropriate

If a foster home is considered to be potentially permanent, issues of race, ethnicity, and religion must be considered in the same way they are for adoptive placements.

How can foster parents who hoped to adopt be supported when reunification is achieved?

Foster parents have always had to deal with their own feelings of loss and grief when children leave their homes for new placements, adoption, or to return to their families. When the placement allows for the possibility of adoption, there will be an even greater level of pain and disappointment. Agencies can help support foster parents with these issues in several ways.

Address the Issue From the Beginning

- Prepare foster parents for the possibility of the loss of the child.
- Make permanency plans clear.
- Do not make promises that cannot be kept.
- Involve foster parents in permanency planning decisions throughout the process.
- Have foster parents examine their own experiences with loss and grief at the same time they learn about the effects of separation and loss on children.

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Recognize Foster Parents' Grief

- Give foster parents time to grieve. Do not ask them to take another child immediately.
- Set up a system of "buddy families." Families who have experienced this loss and gone on to foster or adopt other children can provide one-on-one support.
- Organize, or encourage foster parents themselves to organize, a support group for families dealing with loss.

Provide Continuity When Appropriate

In some cases it will be appropriate and in the best interests of the child as well as both families to continue connections after the child leaves the foster home.

- Families who have worked with birth families toward reunification or adoption by relatives may have developed relationships that can be sustained.
- Families who served in a mentoring capacity may continue to do so on either a formal or informal basis.
- Foster families may be willing to serve as respite caregivers for children who have left their homes.

CHECKLIST

National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning

Hunter College School of Social Work

Concurrent Permanency Planning—Differential Assessment Tools

FAMILY STRENGTHS/EARLY REUNIFICATION INDICATORS

Strengths and resources that can be called on to help the family plan for timely reunification and improve children's well-being

PARENT–CHILD RELATIONSHIP

- The parent shows empathy and concern for the child.
- The parent responds positively and supportively to the child's verbal and nonverbal signals.
- The parent shows the ability to put the child's needs ahead of his or her own.
- When they are together, the child shows comfort in parent's presence.
- The parent has raised the child for a significant period of time.
- In the past, the parent has met the child's basic physical and emotional needs.
- The parent accepts some responsibility for the problems that brought the child into care or the attention of the authorities.

PARENT SUPPORT SYSTEM

- The parent has positive, significant relationships with other adults who seem not to have overt problems (e.g., spouse, parents, friends, relatives).
- The parent has a meaningful support system that can help him now (e.g., church, job, counselor).
- Extended family is nearby and capable of providing support.

SOURCE: Adapted from concurrent planning materials from Lutheran Social Services of Washington & Idaho.

CHECKLIST

FAMILY STRENGTHS/EARLY REUNIFICATION INDICATORS, CONTINUED

PAST SUPPORT SYSTEM

- ❖ Extended family history shows family members able to help out and provide support when one member is not functioning well.
- ❖ Relatives came forward to offer help when the child needed placement.
- ❖ Relatives have followed through on commitments in the past.
- ❖ There are significant other adults, not blood relatives, who have helped in the past.
- ❖ Significant other adults have followed through on commitments in the past.

FAMILY HISTORY

- ❖ Family's ethnic, cultural, or religious heritage includes an emphasis on mutual caretaking and shared parenting in times of crisis.
- ❖ The parent's own history shows consistency of parent caretaker.
- ❖ The parent's history shows evidence of his or her childhood needs being met adequately.

CHILD'S OVERALL DEVELOPMENT

- ❖ The child shows age-appropriate cognitive abilities.
- ❖ The child is able to attend to tasks at an age-appropriate level.
- ❖ The child shows evidence of conscience development.
- ❖ The child has age-appropriate social skills.
- ❖ The child's behavioral problems are managed and redirected positively.
- ❖ The child's health care needs have been met routinely.

SOURCE: Adapted from concurrent planning materials from Lutheran Social Services of Washington & Idaho.

CHECKLIST

National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning

Hunter College School of Social Work

Concurrent Permanency Planning—Differential Assessment Tools

"POOR PROGNOSIS" for Reunification INDICATORS—Permanency Planning Red Flags

Conditions that might make timely reunification difficult or unlikely. Conditions with an (*) are associated with a very low probability for family reunification.

CATASTROPHIC PRIOR ABUSE

- The parent has killed or seriously harmed another child through abuse or neglect, and no significant change has occurred in the interim (*).
- The parent has repeatedly and with premeditation harmed or tortured this child (*).
- The child has experienced physical or sexual abuse in infancy (treatment of parent may be so difficult and lengthy that child spends years in foster care).

SIGNIFICANT CHILD WELFARE HISTORY

- Parental rights to another child have been terminated following a period of service delivery to the parent, and no significant change has occurred in the interim (*).
- There have been three or more CPS interventions for serious separate incidents, indicating a chronic pattern of abuse or severe neglect.
- In addition to emotional trauma, the child has suffered more than one form of physical abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse.
- Other children have been placed in foster care or with relatives for periods of over 6 months or have had repeated placements with CPS intervention.
- The child has been abandoned and left in the care of friends, relatives, a hospital, or a foster home; or once the child is placed in subsequent care, the parent does not visit her.
- CPS preventive measures have failed to keep the child with the parent.
- The parent is under the age of 16 with no parenting support systems, and placement of the child and parent together has failed due to parent's behavior.
- The parent has asked to relinquish the child on more than one occasion following initial intervention.

SOURCE: Adapted from concurrent planning materials from Lutheran Social Services of Washington & Idaho.

CHECKLIST

POOR PROGNOSIS INDICATORS, CONTINUED

- The parent is addicted to debilitating drugs or alcohol and has been unable to provide consistent parenting or self-care.
- There is a pattern of documented domestic violence between the spouses of 1 year or longer, and they refuse to separate.
- The parent has a recent history of serious criminal activity and jail.
- The mother abused drugs or alcohol during pregnancy, disregarding medical advice to the contrary.
- The parent experienced foster care, group care, or intergenerational abuse.

INHERENT DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEMS

- The parent diagnosed with a severe mental illness (e.g., psychosis, schizophrenia, border-line personality disorder, sociopathy) that has not responded to previously delivered mental health services; and parent's symptoms continue, with parent unable to protect and nurture the child (*).
- The parent diagnosed with a chronic debilitating mental illness that responds slowly or not at all to current treatment modalities.
- The parent is intellectually impaired, has shown significant problems in self-care, and has no support system of relatives able to share parenting.

SOURCE: Adapted from concurrent planning materials from Lutheran Social Services of Washington & Idaho.

CHECKLIST ON ADOPTION

Focus on Goodness of Fit

YES	NO	
—	—	Do the foster parents understand the dual goals of concurrent planning?
—	—	Have the foster parents made an informed decision regarding the commitment they are willing to make at the present time?
—	—	Are the foster parents committed to achieving the best possible permanent home for the child?
—	—	Are the foster parents willing to work cooperatively with birth parents?
—	—	Has the family been approved for adoption through a home study?
—	—	Does the child meet the family's adoption criteria in terms of: O age O sex O strengths O special needs O temperament O other considerations
—	—	Is the family able to provide support for the child's cultural and religious heritage?
—	—	Is the family willing to continue a relationship with the birth family after adoption?
—	—	If siblings are not also being adopted, is the family willing to facilitate the continuation of the sibling bond?
—	—	Is the family prepared for the possibility that they will not be able to adopt the child?

11

Foster Parent as Team Member

What do we mean when we say the foster parent is a member of the permanency planning team? What are the qualities that define a team?

- Team members have shared goals. For the permanency planning team, this means that all members want the child to achieve permanence in a timely fashion.
- Team members share values. Members of the permanency planning team understand the importance of families, believe that families have strengths and can change, and understand the need to provide continuity for children. Services must be child-centered and family-focused.
- Team members understand their roles and those of other team members. They respect the roles and perspectives of others on the team.
- Team members participate in shared decisionmaking in the process of achieving goals.
- Team members resolve conflicts in the best interest of those goals.

How do we effect changes in agency culture that support the valuation of foster parents as professional members of the permanency planning team?

It is one thing to tell foster parents that they are members of the team and give them new sets of tasks (e.g., attending meetings, mentoring birth parents, transporting children) to perform as part of that team. But it is sometimes more difficult for child welfare professionals to value foster parents as partners who have input into the decisionmaking process. And it is almost impossible for individual caseworkers and supervisors to value the team approach if the agency culture does not support them.

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Secure Commitment From the Top Down

The highest levels of administration can lead the agency in demonstrating commitment to a team approach by:

- authorizing time and resources for training and conferences;
- participating in team-building activities themselves;
- exploring the use of teamwork at other decisionmaking levels within the organization;
- inviting foster parents to participate in planning and writing new procedural guidelines;
- directing supervisors and managers to attend training and implement teamwork principles; and
- requesting, reviewing, and acting on progress reports as teams begin working.

Actively Manage the Process of Change

Agencies interested in creating an atmosphere in which permanency teams can work to improve outcomes for children may wish to use some of the tools of organizational development (OD). OD is a set of methods and tools for understanding, introducing, managing, and sustaining change effectively over time in order to increase organizational effectiveness (Beckhard, 1969; and as cited in Annie E. Casey, 1997a). The *Family to Family* initiative applied OD principles to the field of child welfare in their tool *Building Support for Innovation Inside Child Welfare Agencies.* You can order a copy of this tool from

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How do we change our approach to the treatment of foster parents so that we are clearly articulating a belief that they are team members who make valuable contributions?

Be Respectful of Foster Parents and Their Time

- Address foster parents as you would other professionals. Do not address parents by their first names unless there is a clear understanding that you are both on a first-name basis.
- Send foster parents the same information letters, invitations to meetings, and additional items that other members of the team receive.
- Give adequate notice of meetings.
- Schedule meetings at times that are convenient for foster parents. The schedules of working parents should be accommodated by early or late starting times. Provide child care for parents of young children.
- Listen respectfully to the input of foster parents.

Identify Team Members and Their Roles

From the beginning of the case-planning process, all team members should know who is involved. Team members might include:

- the child and his or her birth family;
- the foster family;
- extended family or potential adoptive family, if applicable;
- caseworker;
- supervisor;
- school personnel;
- medical personnel;
- therapist or counselor;

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- attorney or guardian *ad litem;* and
- any other service providers.

Resolve Conflicts in the Best Interest of the Goals of the Team

Establish a procedure for conflict resolution that ensures that all parties will be heard and will feel their position is valued, even if it is not the course of action chosen by the team.

Provide a Mechanism for Self-Assessment That Gives All Team Members an Opportunity to State Their Views

Conduct a periodic assessment of progress toward the goal and also of the strengths and weaknesses of the teamwork process.

What training and support do we offer to foster parents to back up that articulation with action?

Team-Building Exercises Demonstrate the Importance of Teamwork to All Team Members

Foster parents, and caseworkers and supervisors as well, may benefit from practice in which information sharing is an essential part of a problem-solving, goal-oriented activity.

- General team decisionmaking exercises can demonstrate the value of cooperation and synergy in solving a problem. There are many training activity materials in print. Two well-known and widely available exercises are "Lost on the Moon" and "Survival in the Desert." These activities can be used with homogeneous audiences (all foster parents, all caseworkers).
- Activities written about permanency planning team decisionmaking go a step further in helping team members understand the challenge and their part in it. Design your own case scenarios to use as learning tools. These activities work best if individuals with different roles on the real permanency team take part together, but participants do not have to be members of the same team.

- When an actual team is assembled, consider taking the time to involve the members in a brief team-building activity at the outset. An exercise in which team members have to cooperate to solve a problem, complete a puzzle, or build a structure of some kind can be a way to break the ice and get all team members involved on an equal footing.

Address Improvement in the Process

- Do not assume that once a team approach is developed you are finished.
- Set up a committee to evaluate the use of permanency teams. Include members of all constituencies on the committee.
- Elicit feedback from team members on barriers they encountered.
- Select a limited number of identified barriers and ask team members for suggestions to overcome them.
- Have the committee develop an improvement plan.
- Implement the plan and repeat the process at a scheduled point in the future.

Publish and Publicize Results

Let everyone know how the teamwork approach has affected your service to children and families.

- Keep statistics on length of stay in foster care, number of families reunified, average time from removal to termination of parental rights, and number of children adopted by foster families. Let administrators know how you are doing.
- Collect anecdotal information and personal stories from birth and foster families. Pass these on to upper levels of management, too.
- Write a periodic newsletter for everyone who serves on permanency planning teams. Include statistics, personal stories, and a message from the head of your agency.

Ideas to Think About: Partnerships Between Professionals and Natural Helpers

One of the tools developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in its *Family to Family* initiative is *Walking Our Talk in the Neighborhoods: Partnerships Between Professionals and Natural*

Helpers. This paper presents ideas about developing neighborhood and professional partnerships to create a different approach to serving families.

Although this tool does not specifically identify foster parents as natural or neighborhood helpers, they are just that. Families living in the same communities as the families being served by child welfare and other professionals provide just the kinds of informal and personal supports discussed in this booklet. When they become licensed as foster parents they also have a relationship with and an obligation to the agency, but they remain in the community and retain their relationships within it.

When agencies approach permanency through teamwork that includes professionals in child welfare, education, medicine, the law, and foster parents, they are building partnerships between professionals and natural helpers.

- The *Family to Family* tool addresses some of the challenges that may occur when professionals and natural helpers work together. They are some of the very challenges we find when foster parents are included as members of the permanency planning team. Following are several sections in their entirety that will bring to your attention some of the issues you will have to face as you try to implement a true teamwork approach to permanency. Selections reproduced (Annie E.Casey 1997e, pp. 14–15, 18) are:
  - Emotional Reactions of Some Professionals
  - Emotional Reactions for Some Natural Helpers
  - Differences in Wording Between Some Professionals and Natural Helpers

For more information about this tool and the other *Family to Family* materials, visit the website at www.aecf.org/familytofamily or contact

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Emotional Reactions of Some Professionals

In any new venture, anxiety, frustration, and confusion are likely. Some examples of particular triggers professionals may encounter include the following:

- They may literally be unable to understand the language, accent, or some of the phrases used by natural helpers. This is not a pleasant feeling. Natural helpers are usually from

different cultures than professionals. Differences in greeting behaviors, eye contact, formality, touch, and ways of expressing emotions can rapidly offend on a personal level when participants are not aware of their cultural differences.

- Some professionals may worry that natural helpers will usurp their roles and endanger their job security. It is hard to feel great about someone who might leave you unemployed. They may risk credibility with their peers who may see them as betraying their profession and going over to the wrong side.
- We really have very little, if any, hard data about what natural helpers are accomplishing, and what they would be able to accomplish if they had more training and support. There is always the risk that helpers may do harm instead of help, and the professional may be blamed.
- Natural helpers usually do not keep schedules the same way professionals do. They are much more flexible in responding to immediate needs. Professionals may take offense at lateness or missed meetings, when it is a cultural difference rather than an insult. Because they often have fewer financial resources, natural helpers have fewer options in many emergencies. Cars are more likely to break down, and airfares or tuition may not be available as planned. Professionals will likely become entangled in these predicaments. Professionals may need to provide transportation for natural helpers without cars. This takes additional time.

Emotional Reactions for Some Natural Helpers

Natural helpers are also likely to have their feelings triggered by beginning interactions with professionals. They also risk interacting with someone who is, again, literally impossible for them to understand. Professional jargon, acronyms, and concepts are often not only totally foreign but also insulting to those who believe many professionals have absolutely no idea what it is like to survive under difficult situations.

Inadvertently and sometimes intentionally, professionals shut natural helpers out of the decisionmaking processes. This can be done through lack of eye contact, a raised eyebrow, failure to invite to meetings, and frequently, polite nods but no real understanding when natural helpers speak.

These exclusionary behaviors are particularly painful to natural helpers because it is now trendy to include them in the helping process. Forums, advisory boards, and new funding streams often advertise new principles involving "neighborhood-based" partnerships and helping people help themselves. But in many cases the real power rests with the same power brokers who have always had it. Natural helpers are aware of meetings held without them,

token input, and being put on advisory boards instead of boards of directors. The discrepancy between what professionals say they do and what they actually do makes it difficult for natural helpers to respect them. It makes it difficult for natural helpers to keep trying to work with professionals. It makes it very difficult for natural helpers not to get angry. Professionals also frequently fail to understand the importance of a personal and long-term commitment to natural helpers and other residents of the neighborhoods where they work. Natural helpers are aware of the importance of relationships, and the importance of finding professionals to whom they can relate. Those relationships are precious and have meaning beyond "business." If they end when the grant is over, or when someone gets promoted, it is seen as another betrayal.

Table 4. Differences in Wording Between Some Professionals and Natural Helpers

Some Professionals	Some Natural Helpers
Target population	People who need and want help
Case assignment	Who responds to which needs of this family?
Caseloads	How many families can we help together?
Cases	People
Client	Person, like me, who sometimes has problems in some areas
Service provider	People who help others, fellow person, neighbor, child of God
Vendor: "You will do what I want."	Partner: "We decide together."
Office hours	Whenever they need to talk, all the time
9–5 weekdays	All the time
Hot line	Home phone
Supervision	Talking every day
Length of service	Defining moments, being there when needed
Service delivery	A helping hand
Client pathways	Figuring out a clear way to make things better
Therapy	Talking together, only people do not need letters after their names
Diagnosis: What is this person?	What does this person want and need? How can I help?
Making an assessment	Getting to know one another
The child's needs	How can we help this child succeed?
Risk assessment	How can we help this kid be okay?
Confidentiality	Secrecy
The "bumper" mentality, going at it alone	Reaching out
Being realistic	Having hope
Poor adults can raise children properly	Having a job
Being called	Being objective and cool
Being personal	Witnessing the pain
Keeping work and life separate	Work and life have a big overlap
Following the rules	Forging a path, taking one step after another
People as recipients of service	People helping one another
The problem is in the person	Outcomes arise from complex interactions of factors
Services are "talking about problems"	Help is concrete—getting a snake out of the kitchen, making a "Beware of Wolf" sign
Public housing rules regarding number of people per room	Taking in a foster child

CHECKLIST ON TEAMS

Focus on Building the Team

YES	NO	
___	___	List the team members. Supervisor: Caseworker: Guardian/attorney: Foster family members: Birth family members: Others:
___	___	Have all team members been given information about teamwork and about the permanency planning process?
___	___	How have all team members been invited to the first meeting (check all that apply)? ___ personal letter ___ telephone call ___ follow-up ___ form letter ___ e-mail
		Who will facilitate the first meeting?
		What method or activity will be used to introduce team members to one another?
___	___	Will a brief teambuilding activity be conducted to put members at ease and help them practice teamwork skills? If "yes," what activity is planned?
		What are the goals for the first meeting? 1. 2. 3.

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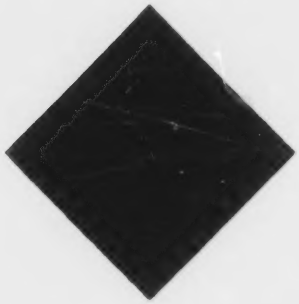

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Over the last decade, the role of a foster parent has evolved from that of a temporary caregiver to being an essential part of a professional team in determining the best long-term plan for children in their care. This publication focuses on practical ways in which best child welfare practice can be incorporated into the recruitment, training, and support of foster parents. It also looks at ways that agencies can enhance the role of foster parents in a changing child welfare system. Sections with discussion and practical tips cover foster parents' roles as:

- Nurturer and caregiver
- Child development support
- Disciplinarian
- Recruiter, trainer, and mentor to new foster parents
- Supporter and advocate in school issues
- Facilitator and mentor for birth parents
- Potential adoptive parent
- Team member

With this vision of best practice, child welfare professionals can continue to improve their services and improve children's chances for safety, permanency, and well-being.

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